

ALFRED
HITCHCOCK's
MYSTERY MAGAZINE

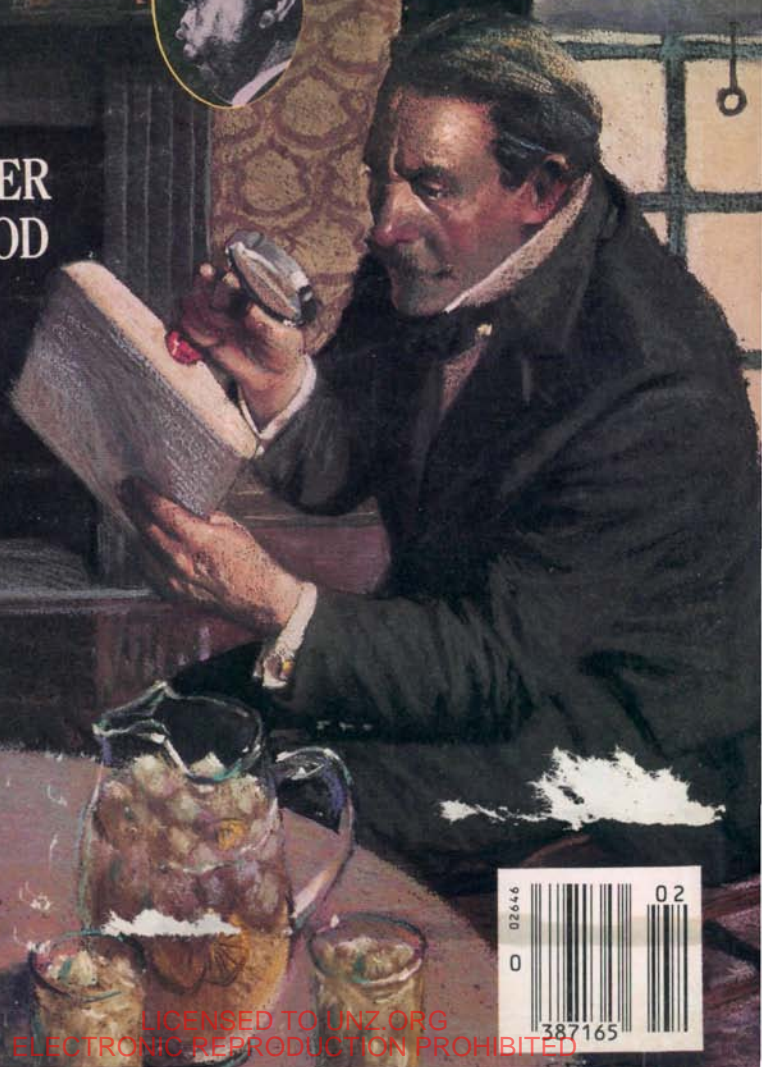
February, 1988 \$2.00 U.S./\$2.50 Can.



**A MATTER
OF BLOOD
AND
WAX**

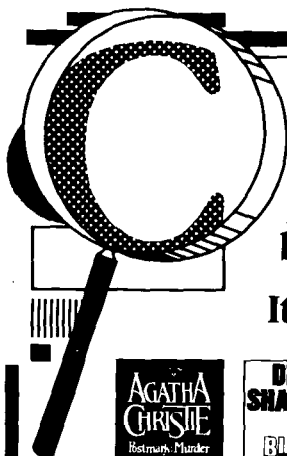
by Erich
Obermayr

**...AND
MORE
NEW
CRIME
STORIES**



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED





Crime buffs, thrill seekers,
gumshoe groupies & regular folks
belong to the Mystery Guild.

It's your kind of place!



0091 Spec. ed.



3517 \$14.95



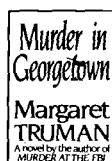
6114 \$14.95



* 9035 \$14.95



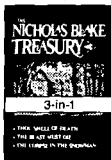
3509 \$16.95



9316 \$16.95



9209 \$19.95



0117 Spec. ed.



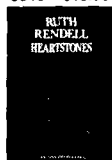
0158 Spec. ed.



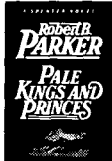
3319 \$16.95



9084 \$18.95



2519 \$10.95



9050 \$16.95



9639 \$16.95



2477 \$15.95



0414 \$15.95



7872 \$17.95



9548 \$17.95

How The Mystery Guild works: Get 6 exciting books for 99¢ (plus shipping and handling) PLUS a free tote bag when accepted as a member. We reserve the right to reject any application. However, once accepted as a member, if you are not satisfied, return the books at Club expense within 10 days. Your membership will be cancelled and you'll owe nothing.

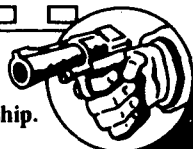
Big selection, big savings! About every 4 weeks (14 times a year), you'll get the Club bulletin describing the featured Selections and Alternates. Plus, up to 4 times a year, you may receive offers of special Selections—all at discounts off publishers' prices. To get the featured Selections, do nothing; they'll be shipped automatically. If you prefer an Alternate or no book at all, return the form provided with your preference by the date specified. That date allows you 10 days to decide. If you have less than 10 days and get an unwanted Selection, return it at Club expense and owe nothing. A shipping and handling charge is added to all shipments.

Easy purchase plan! You need buy only 4 books at regular low Club prices during your first year of membership; then continue to enjoy Club benefits without obligation or resign at any time. The Mystery Guild offers its own complete, hardbound editions, sometimes altered in size to fit special presses and save you even more.

* Explicit scenes and/or language may be offensive to some.

Guild editions save you up to 50% off publishers' edition prices quoted above.

ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



Take any 6 books for 99¢ with membership.

Values up to \$113.70 in Publishers' Editions.



★ 4499 \$17.95



3004 \$15.95



0265 \$17.95



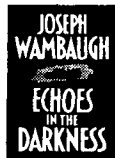
3947 \$15.95



4598 \$15.95



4572 \$12.95



★ 7898 \$18.95



8490 Spec. ed.



8771 \$15.95



★ 2816 \$12.95



★ 8474 \$18.95



★ 9225 \$17.95



3954 Spec. ed.



8458 \$18.95



0042 Spec. ed.



9407 \$15.95



9019 \$15.95



9068 \$14.95

* Explicit scenes and/or language may be offensive to some.

FREE
TOTE
with membership



MYSTERY
GUILD

Garden City, NY 11535

Please accept my application for membership in The Mystery Guild and send me the 6 books indicated below plus my FREE tote bag. Bill me 99¢ plus shipping and handling. I understand that I need buy only 4 books at regular low Club prices during the first year of my membership to complete my commitment. My membership will be subject to the terms and conditions presented in this ad.

No-risk guarantee: If not delighted after examining my 6 selections, I may return the books within 10 days at Club expense. My membership will be cancelled and I will owe nothing. I may keep the FREE tote bag in any case.

--	--	--	--	--	--

CT-923

Mr. _____
Ms. _____
(Please print)

Address _____ Apt. # _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

If under 18, parent must sign. _____

Members accepted in U.S.A. and Canada only.
Offer slightly different in Canada.

35-MG60

CONTENTS



SHORT STORIES

DUCK WORK by Rob Kantner	8
BANTAM ROOSTER by Hal Shaffer	24
ROUGHING IT by Michael Beres	34
WITH LOVE AND SHOVELS by Bruce Scates	41
PHASES OF THE MOON by Gary Alexander	50
A MATTER OF BLOOD AND WAX by Erich Obermayr	70
MYSTERIOUS WAYS by Richard F. McGonegal	101
BLOODLINES by Doug Allyn	108
REVENGE by Charles D. McIntosh	125
THE FINAL DEADBEAT by James G. Holding	129
LAST ROUND by Bill Crenshaw	138

MYSTERY CLASSIC

THE POOL OF THE STONE GOD by A. Merritt	144
--	------------

DEPARTMENTS

EDITOR'S NOTES	6
THE MYSTERIOUS PHOTOGRAPH	69
UNSOLVED by Diane C. Baldwin	99
SOLUTION TO THE JANUARY "UNSOLVED"	100
BOOKED & PRINTED by Mary Cannon	148
MURDER BY DIRECTION by Peter Shaw	152
THE STORY THAT WON	155

ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE Vol. 33, No. 2, February, 1988. Published 13 times a year, every 28 days, by Davis Publications, Inc., \$2.00 per copy in the U.S.A. \$2.50 in Canada. Annual subscription \$19.50 in the U.S.A. and possessions; \$23.00 elsewhere payable in advance in U.S. funds. Allow 6 to 8 weeks for change of address. Editorial and Executive Offices, 380 Lexington Ave., N.Y., N.Y. 10017. Subscription orders and mail regarding subscription should be sent to P.O. Box 1932, Marion, O. 43305. Call (614)383-3141 with questions regarding your subscription. Second class postage paid at New York, N.Y., and at additional mailing office. Canadian 3rd class postage paid at Windsor, Ontario. © 1988 by Davis Publications, Inc., all rights reserved. The stories in this magazine are all fictitious, and any resemblance between the characters in them and actual persons is completely coincidental. Protection secured under the Universal Copyright Convention. Reproduction or use without express permission of editorial or pictorial content in any manner is prohibited. Printed in U.S.A. All submissions must be accompanied by stamped self-addressed envelope; the Publisher assumes no responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts. POSTMASTER: Send Form 3579 to Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine, P.O. Box 1932, Marion, Ohio 43305. In Canada return to 628 Monmouth Rds., Windsor, Ontario, N8Y3L1. **ISSN: 0002-5224.**

Cover by Joel Spector

COVER BY JOEL SPECTOR
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Quit Playing Around!



This is the mystery game you've been looking for!

Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine Game has it all. You can play it by yourself or with friends: play the mysteries provided or make up your own.

It's unique game system allows clues to "disappear" and new information to be revealed as time goes by. You can even use the skills of Ellery Queen himself to solve the mysteries.

Games magazine describes it perfectly: "... it's a real mystery lover's game, with all the excitement and flavor of a well-crafted whodunit."

What did you expect, from the game bearing the name of "The World's Leading Mystery Magazine?"

Order today!

Mayfair Games P.O. Box 48539 Niles, IL 60648

- ☐ Please send me a copy of EQMMG. Enclosed is my check/money order for \$19.00 (includes \$2.00 p/h).
- ☐ Please send me a copy of EQMMG and five extra mysteries to solve in *The Casebook of Nick Velvet*. Enclosed is my check/money order for \$27.00 (includes \$3.00 p/h).

Name _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

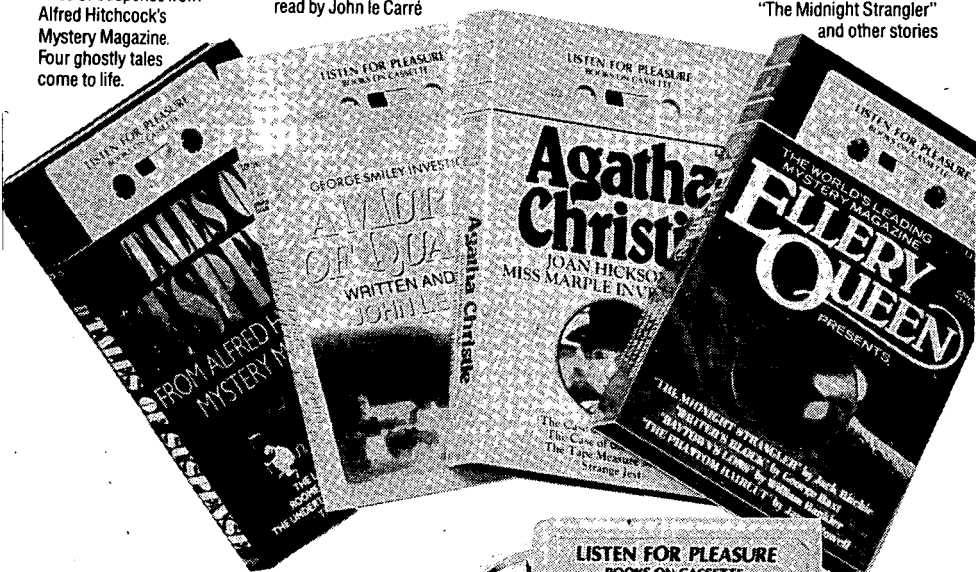
HEAR THE EVIDENCE AND MAKE A KILLING.

#7176
Tales of Suspense from
Alfred Hitchcock's
Mystery Magazine.
Four ghostly tales
come to life.

#7161
A Murder of Quality
John le Carré
read by John le Carré

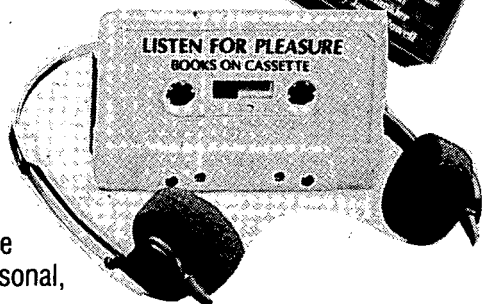
#7172
Miss Marple Investigates
read by Joan Hickson

#7179
Ellery Queen Presents
"The Midnight Strangler"
and other stories



Welcome to the newest dimension
of the world of mystery and thrills –
the cassette "book" from 'Listen
for Pleasure'. These books on cassette
are ready to play on any standard personal,
home or auto cassette player.

Now you can enjoy a selection of the world's finest mystery and thriller
writers. Each is dramatically read by a famous actor or author such as
John Le Carré or Nigel Hawthorne. **And you can also enjoy substantial
savings with this introductory offer.**



ALL RIGHTS RESERVED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ENJOY THESE 4 BOOKS ON CASSETTE AND PAY FOR JUST 3.

**SAVE
25% OFF
REGULAR
RETAIL PRICE!**

Take 4 titles, pay only for 3.
(Single titles available
for \$14.95 each)

Books on
cassette
are
ideal

- for driving ...



- relaxing at home...



- or while walking,
jogging or exercising.



Mail to:

**Listen for Pleasure Ltd.
One Colomba Drive
Niagara Falls, New York, 14305**

☐ Please ship me all 4 titles. I understand I will pay only for 3. I enclose payment of \$48.60 (incl. shipping & handling). Please add N.Y. Sales Tax where applicable.

Choose method of payment:

☐ Check or money order enclosed (No C.O.D.'s please)

Charge my

☐ American Express ☐ Visa ☐ Mastercard ☐ Diners Club

Card #

Exp. Date

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

--	--	--	--

Signature _____

(We need your signature to ship your order).

IF you do not wish to take advantage of this offer,
single titles may be ordered by title number.

Please ☐ LFP# _____ TOTAL \$17.95
check: (Includes shipping & handling)

☐ LFP# _____ + TOTAL \$33.15
(Includes shipping & handling)

Ship to:

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____

STATE _____

ZIP _____

For faster service, call Toll Free 1-(800)-843-8404

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

EDITOR'S NOTES

by Cathleen Jordan

In this issue... we are pleased to present several new (to us) authors. And to extend a particularly special welcome to James Grant Holding, author of "The Final Deadbeat"; all our long-term readers will remember the pleasure his grandfather, James Holding, has given us with his own stories over the years (some seventy-five of them since 1960, as a matter of fact). Mr. Holding *grand-père* hasn't been doing much writing lately—and we all very much hope he hasn't permanently abandoned the field—but in the meantime his grandson has been producing short stories and a novel, a western called *Death Hunt*, published in 1978 by Manor Books.

Richard F. McGonegal, a

Missouri journalist and author of the light-hearted "Mysterious Ways," almost certainly debuts as a fiction writer in our pages, though another story has been accepted elsewhere. And Erich Obermayr, author of our cover story, "A Matter of Blood and Wax," is an archaeologist specializing in the western United States who has written several other stories and who finds that "writing and archaeology seem to go well together. The creativity of writing has its analogy in the interpretive aspects of archaeology."

Also, we'd like to welcome back Charles D. McIntosh, author of "Revenge," who has returned to writing after a career in advertising. He had previously published four stories in

Cathleen Jordan, Editor; **Lois Adams**, Managing Editor; **Brian Cox**, Associate Editor; **Ralph Rubino**, Art Director; **Terri Czezko**, Associate Art Director; **Ron Kuliner**, Art Editor; **Dennis Doyle**, Associate Designer; **Nancy Siwinski**, Art Assistant; **Carole Dixon**, Production Manager; **Bob Allen**, Production Assistant; **Cynthia Manson**, Director, Subsidiary Rights; **Florence Eichin**, Manager, Contracts & Permissions; **Sonya Castellucci**, Circulation Director, Retail Marketing; **Paul Christian**, Circulation Planning Director; **Laura Guth**, Circulation Director, Subscriptions; **Veena Raghavan**, Public Relations Promotions Manager; **Irene Bozoki**, Classified Advertising Director; **Risa Lund**, Advertising Services Manager; **William F. Battista**, Publisher

(New York: 212-557-9100; Chicago: 312-346-0712; Los Angeles: 213-785-3114)

Joel Davis, President; **Fred Edinger**, Senior Vice President, Finance; **Paul Collins**, Senior Vice President, Circulation; **Carl Barte**, Vice President, Manufacturing; **Stephen Policoff**, Assistant Vice President, Controller

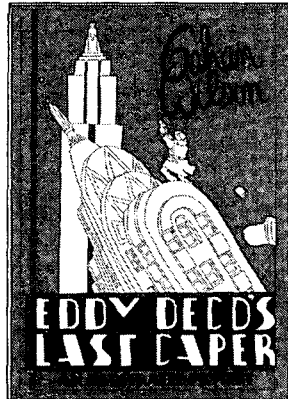
AHMM, the most recent in 1971.

Finally, we owe apologies to two artists who were not properly credited recently. The artist who did our January cover was Istvan Banyai, not Dan

Wagner. Dan Wagner prepared the cover of our new anthology, *Alfred Hitchcock's The Shadow of Silence*. (When we mix things up around here, thankfully not often, we don't do it by halves!)

***The Maltese Falcon* never had it so good**

The *New Yorker* cartoonist, Gahan Wilson, recreates detective fiction at its best in this illustrated mystery that stars Taxi Charlie, The Badgize, and the indefatigable hero Eddy Deco. As events unravel, readers may find clues in the more than 100 original, never-before-seen Gahan Wilson drawings.



Published by
Times BOOKS
A Random House, Inc. Company



FICTION

Duck Work

by Rob Kantner

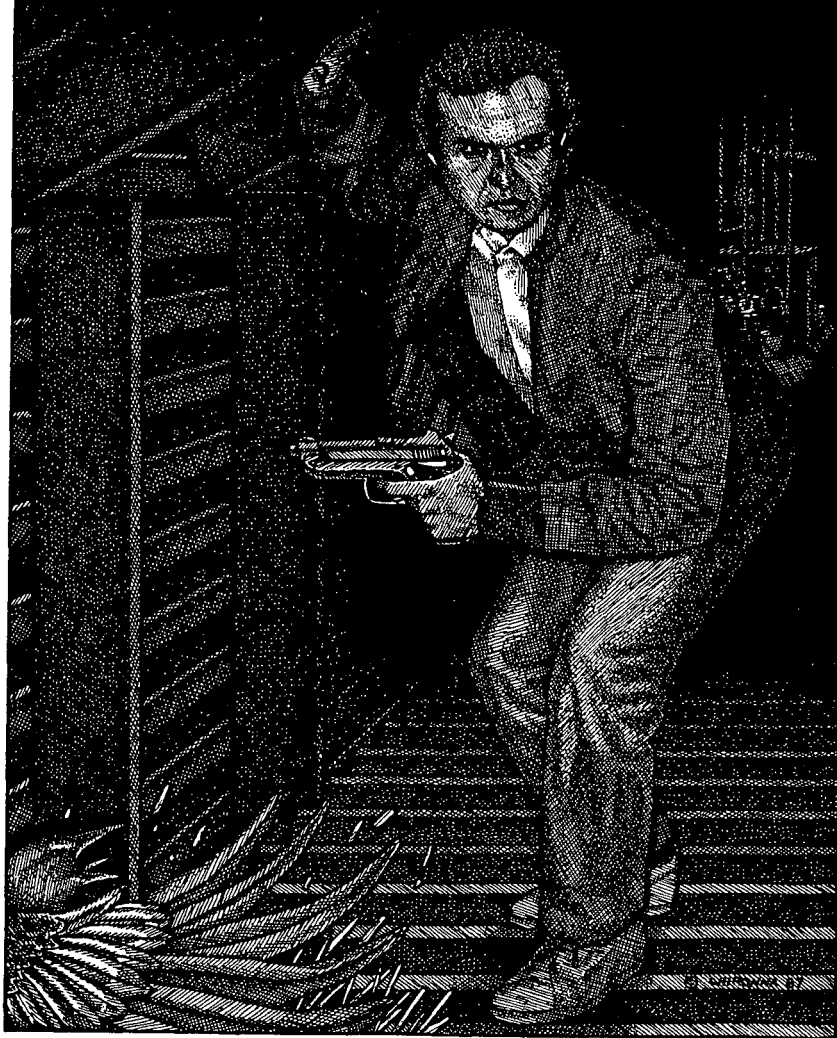


Illustration by Ronald Chironna

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The two-sided billboard atop the lowslung cinder block building said H & C HEATING AND COOLING. An orange banner plastered across the front windows advertised FURNACE REPAIR AND DUCK WORK. A sign spray-painted on the curbstones said CUSTOMER PARKING ONLY. I wasn't a customer, but I parked there anyhow.

The dim showroom was crowded with model furnaces and hot water heaters standing around like stalagmites, but was empty of people except for a worn-looking salesman extolling the features of a Bryant unit to a prospect. From the look on her face, I didn't think he was getting anywhere, so I interrupted. "Where's Owney?"

"Back office."

I walked around the sales counter and through an open doorway into a small, crowded, paneled office. Owney Busbee hung up the phone and rose, a grin cracking his wide, flat, freckled face, and said in his razor-sharp Tennessee twang, "Man, that was quick, Ben."

"You said it was an emergency. What's cooking?"

Owney looked down and sifted absently at the layers of papers, pink callback slips, and other debris on his desk. He's a large, rubbery, pear-shaped man, small-eyed and bald except for

a smear of long darkish red hair bisecting his pale scalp. To see him there at H & C Heating and Cooling, dressed as usual in baggy pants and tieless, colorless sport shirt, you'd make him for just another of Detroit's legion of small-time, just-this-side-of-broke merchants.

But appearances are deceptive and assumptions are dangerous. Owney has at least two other offices. One's in a place in Wayne called Bullet Reality, which he also owns. The other is the front seat of his acre-sized Cadillac, where he spends some fifty thousand miles a year, crisscrossing southeastern Michigan supervising his businesses, making deals, adding steadily to what is probably a pretty substantial fortune. His tools are potent if intangible: salesmanship, an unerring instinct for getting the customer what he wants, an encyclopedic memory, and a roster of private guys peddling part-time skills. Guys like me.

He looked at me and I could see he was anxious. "I got a furnace down in one of my buildings over on Plymouth. One of my boys is away hunting, 'nother one's in the hospital, and the other one's on a job he won't get done till suppertime tonight. Meanwhile, tenant's bitchin' up a storm, and—"

"What's the address?" Owney

gave it. Plymouth near Grand River, near west side. "Sure, I'll shoot over there right now."

"Wal, that's rat fine. I'm grateful." He fished through a fist-sized bundle of keys on his desk, detached one, and handed it over. "Utility entrance, back side." I pocketed it. "Hunnert do it?" he asked.

"Sure." A hundred would get me to day after tomorrow, the outer limits of my financial planning. "Kinda beast we talking about?"

Owney squinted. "Dunno. Gas-fired, I know that, and older'n God."

"Better take along some parts."

"C'mon." Owney led me out of his office and into an adjacent back room, lined with steel shelves laden with parts and a workbench dark with tools. I began filling a box with blower belts of several sizes, a selection of replacement generators, various thermocouples, tubes, and other bits and pieces. Owney stood beside me, large hands shoved into his back pants pockets. "Stayin' busy?"

"Just keeping the plates from hitting the floor."

He laughed. "You ever get wore out on that maintenance job out in Belleville, you come see me, hear?"

"Thanks, Owney."

He scratched his head as I

closed the box and latched it. "How 'bout the detective work? Done any good?"

"Oh, yeah." I hefted the box. Heavy but do-able. "Pay's not great, but the hours are long."

Owney chuckled. "Well, may have something for you along *that* line pretty soon, too."

"Any time, pal, just holler." I grinned dutifully, waved, headed out to my '71 Mustang, secured the box in the trunk, and drove away.

As I headed east on Warren toward the Southfield Freeway, I remembered what I'd said to Owney about the detective work. I hadn't been exactly honest. Fact is, there'd been a whole lot of ugly lately, and I was tired. I planned to go into coast mode for a few weeks and recharge the batteries.

That was one reason I took on Owney's furnace repair job. Another was the money. And the third was the fact that you do favors for people like Owney Busbee whenever you can because he reciprocates in kind. It's the coin of our realm.

The utility door grunted open. I propped it with my foot and shunted my toolbox and the parts box inside, then hit the only available switch and pulled the door shut. A bare bulb on the wall lighted up the grim utility room

and its typical accessories: set tub, mops and buckets and brooms, janitorial supplies, and a wood ladder running up ten feet to an open loft.

Just my luck, I thought. Furnace is up above. Figured. Even from the outside, I could tell the building was one of those strip jobs, built on a slab and subdivided by paper-thin drywall into three suites. A symptom of the era we live in. The Era of Cheap. Maximum return for minimum investment, meaning no basements or crawlspaces, and furnaces placed up above, guaranteeing hernias for aging maintenance guys.

I hoisted my tool and parts boxes up there, then climbed up myself and, duck-walking low under the ceiling, dragged them through the dimness along a narrow two-by-four catwalk to the corner, where presided the furnace: an old Kramer gas-fired job, swathed in dust and, as advertised, cold as a corpse.

I squatted in front of the furnace, opened my toolbox, strapped my battery-operated lamp on my forehead, and switched it on. The loft was stuffy and silent except for the chirping of errant birds and very distant, muffled voices. The ceiling struts seemed just inches above my bare head, and beneath me, below the cheap aluminum joists placed at

twenty-four-inch centers, showed acoustical ceiling tile. Place is held together by chicken wire and spit, I thought. I aimed my face at the furnace and took off the access panel.

Obvious things first. Pilot light was out, but gas supply was okay. Emergency switch was inactive and manual shut-off valve was on. Electrical showed positive. Okay. Could be simplest hundred bucks I ever made, as in the pilot light went out. I fetched a wood kitchen match from my toolbox, flared it on my thumbnail, then mashed the gas cock and lighted the pilot. It took. I blew out the match and held the gas cock down, watching the bluish yellow flame, counting seconds.

The bird noises were still indistinct, but the voices were clearer now, no doubt amplified through the ducts. Spooky-sounding but distinct. Distinct enough to inform me that the man was the boss; the woman, Ginny by name, was an employee. He was married, but not to her. They were alone in the office and having the very best of times down there.

Suddenly I realized that my thirty-second interval had passed several minutes ago. I released the gas cock and turned it to "on." The pilot stayed lit. The burners caught with a whoosh. I inspected them for a

moment; then, satisfied, replaced the access panel, closed the tool and parts boxes, and dragged them back along the narrow catwalk.

I motored around the building to the Plymouth Road exit. A red Toyota Camrey sat there, waiting for traffic to clear. Back in front of the building, by the left-hand suite, sat a dark blue Ford Escort hatchback. A tall, dark-haired woman was just climbing into it. The willing Ginny, no doubt.

So what. I'd done my job and pushed my tired ass a C-note ahead. To hell with the rest of it.

Exactly twenty-four hours later, I was climbing back into that very same bird-infested loft.

My failing is, I guarantee my work. So when Owney called me that afternoon to inform me that the furnace still wasn't working, there was no point in arguing. All I could do was go back and try it again.

The furnace was deadlier than Hoffa. I popped the access panel and peered inside, aided by the light of my forehead lamp. Pilot light was out again. Okay, we're talking thermocouple here. I sorted through the parts box, found a replacement that was close enough for jazz, and went to work.

Once again, I heard voices. Male and female; Ginny and the boss, no doubt. I worked on, entertained by the voices. Almost as good as having a radio on up there.

Him: "... *tremendous* cash intake. You just wouldn't believe it, babe." Her: "Oo, yum." Him: "We're going to get *real* well on this one." Her: "Well, then ... how about it, Ron? Where's my bonus for last month?" Him: "I'll fix it, don't worry. Have to do some creative bookkeeping, you know?" Her: "I'd hate to think you're going cheap on me." Him: "Me, cheap? C'mere. I'll show you how cheap I am. ... Wait a minute, make sure that door's locked. ..."

Hoo boy. In the new silence I completed replacing the thermocouple and went through the pilot-lighting routine again. It took fine, and with a twist of the gas cock the furnace kicked over and roared hotly. Terrific.

This time both the Toyota and the Ford were still out front, by the far-end suite, as I drove out. That interested me not one bit. Such off-to-the-side funny stuff betwixt boss and employee began at the dawn of time, if not before. What was harder to figure was the talk about tremendous sums of cash and bonuses and everything.

But I'd lose no sleep over it. My detective instinct was dor-

mant. And I've learned that if you get through life understanding as much as ten percent of what's going on, you're way ahead, pal.

The first thing I noticed when returning to the building the following night was that there were two cars there. One was the Toyota; one was a dark Buick Century. Not Ginny's.

Yeah, I was back. Yeah, the furnace was still fritzed up. Owney had called me that morning, downright apologetic this time. It's an old crock, Ben, he'd said. Sumbitch'll have to be replaced soon, he'd said. How 'bout giving it a look-see once more, Ben, he'd said.

So back I went. Into the utility room. Up into the loft. Across the catwalk, boxes in hand, to the Kramer, sitting sneering at me in the corner. I could hear the motor humming, accompanied by a weird thunk-thunk-thunk sound. It was running, all right, but now I knew why none of the heat was getting downstairs.

I took off the access panel again and peered in. Sure enough, the belt between the blower and the blower motor was flopping loose. Snapped in half. Frayed and bound up in the pulley. Great.

I shut the furnace down. In the sudden silence all I could

hear was the chirping of birds and, once my ears had adjusted to lower-grade sound, voices through the ducts. Both male, this time.

As I went to work replacing the belt, I tried not to listen to the conversation, but I couldn't help it.

You been what?

You heard me. I been doin' her.

Oh, man. Money, too, I suppose?

Yeah. Nickel-and-dime stuff. Just to keep her happy—

And now she's getting pushy, huh?

Yeah.

Just like Pittsburgh, and D.C. You can't keep your hands off the young stuff, can you, Ron?

Hey, it's vice-versa, too, bud.

So freakin' what. We only been in town here a month. We got three-plus months to go, guaranteed. *If* we play our cards right. Looks to me like you're creating problems—

Well, we better fix this one.

What do you mean, we?

I want you to waste her.

The wrench dropped from my hand. I leaned forward, squinting, the work forgotten, scarcely believing my ears.

Oh no, not me, not this time. You created this problem, you take care of it. Soon. Before she blows the whole thing.

For Chrissake, I—all right.

Jeez. Guess I'll do it tomorrow night, I'll ask her to stay late and take care of it after everybody's gone. She'll just disappear—

Shut up. I don't want to hear about it. Just finish it and don't get into any more fixes like this, okay?

The voices faded and then vanished entirely. Operating on total automatic pilot, I finished replacing the belt and fired up the furnace. It worked. I closed up, packed my gear, lugged it outside. The Toyota and the Century were gone now, I noticed as I drove around front. I motored away, satisfied that the furnace repairs would hold this time, telling myself that I absolutely, positively would not be back.

“**T**he left-hand suite?”
“Yeah, down at the west end there.”

“I don't know for sure. I'm in my car; I don't have my records with me. How come you wanna know?”

“Come on, Owney, humor me.”

“Um, wal, seems to me it's some kinda investment firm or something.”

“Know anything else about 'em?”

“They pay their rent.”

“Anything else?”

“That's *all* I need to know, Ben.”

“Oh. Okay.”

“What's going on? That furnace still acting up?”

“Working fine when I left there.”

“Guess that solves the problem then, huh.”

“One of 'em.”

“Let me see if I got this straight. You was fixing a furnace in this building, and you overheard some kinda garbled conversation that leads you to believe a murder's gonna get done tomorrow night.”

“Right, uh-huh.”

“I'm genuinely shocked at this news.”

“Leave off the sarcasm, okay? I just figured as chief of the Detroit police homicide squad you might want to head off a murder for once, instead of dealing with it after.”

“Man, there's all kinda problems with this.”

“Especially for the victim.”

“Number one, maybe you misunderstood what you heard.”

“Come on, Elvin, you know me better than that.”

“Then there's a silly little thing called probable cause. We bust in there on the word of some nobody private detective, and if there's no stiff who do we arrest? And what for?”

“Ron what's-his-name. For conspiracy.”

“On the sole basis of your say-

so. Right. If we was to arrest everybody who talked ugly without a permit, you'da been in the Walled-Off Astoria *long* time ago."

"This was more than just talking ugly."

"And it's also less than a crime, 'cept in your own overheated imagination. We got enough to do down here—"

"Listen—"

"—bare handful of guys ridin' herd on a city full of teenagers killing each other. More'n two hundred of them shot down this year alone. Little babies, some of 'em, sitting peaceably on their porches only to catch a bullet in the eye—"

"Elvin—"

"—crack wars, racial incidents, plus the regular old garden-variety domestic disturbances that result in hair on the walls average of three times a week—"

"Look, I know you're busy—"

"Busy! He say I'm *busy*! Slick-o private eye sits on his dead ass out in lily-white Belleville an' call me BUSY!"

"Captain Dance."

"Yeah?"

"I'm reporting a potential homicide."

"Look . . . best I can tell ya, I'll send a squad car swinging around there sometime tomorrow evening, check up on things. Okay?"

"Okay."

"Okay. Happy to oblige. Say something nice 'bout Detroit, hear?"

"Doing the best I can, bro."

As I passed the front of the building the next afternoon, I saw that the lot in front of the westernmost suite was crowded with cars, including Ginny's Escort and Ron's Toyota. That figured; it wasn't quitting time yet. Wouldn't be any action for a while, not till the other employees left. Plenty of time for me to get into position.

Instead of pulling into the rear lot, I took the first corner off Plymouth Road onto Ohio Street, went up about half a block, and parked at the curb. I locked up the Mustang and hoofed it back the way I'd come, hopped a chain link fence, crossed the back lot, and used Owney's key to let me into the utility entrance once more.

I'd spent the night tossing in the twilight of half-formed sleep, unable to shut down my mind. All the arguments paraded before my reviewing stand in an endless circle. Could be you *did* misunderstand and she's in no danger. And even if she is, it's not like she's your sister, or friend, or client, or even anyone you've ever *met*, for God's sake. It couldn't be less your busi-

ness. There's *got* to be a place to draw the line, and this is it. And you're tired; too much work, too many cases rolling you along like a boulder in an avalanche; you deserve a break, could be exhaustion has weakened your judgment; how do you know you'll even have the right moves when you need them? Ease off, Ben. No one will know. Duck it.

Powerful arguments. Irrefutable logic. And, of course, none of it worked worth a damn.

I mounted the wood ladder into the loft. It was an easy trip this time; no toolboxes to tote, no tools at all except for two. Strapped to my forehead: the battery-powered light. Carried securely in the waistband of my jeans against my spine: my .45 automatic.

Bent nearly double, I stepped silently along the catwalk to the furnace, which was humming away merrily. Good job, Ben old son, I thought; quality work sooner or later. I hit the emergency shutoff—I was going to need silence up there—and all went quiet except for the distant muffled chirping of birds and the even more distant drone of voices from down below.

Then, switching on my light, I backtracked along the catwalk to the beam that bisected the building longways and started my hunchbacked, teetering walk westbound, toward

the suite occupied by Ron and Ginny and friends.

I'd considered simply staking out the front of the building and awaiting developments. The idea had appeal—certainly better than the prospect of crawling around in a dark, dusty, bird- and spider-infested attic—but the problem was the word "awaiting." Putting myself in Ron's mind, I'd concluded that, if I was going to whack Ginny, I'd do it right there inside the building, once everyone else had left. Inside, there was no possibility of witnesses. The neighborhood was solidly commercial for blocks around; no one around to hear anything. If I was going to do any good, I'd have to be on top of the situation. Literally.

Along the way I encountered two load-bearing cinder block walls, which defined the divisions between the suites below. Through each wall was hacked a small, just barely man-sized hole. I cleared these with some effort and pressed on. The voices below were fading. End-of-the-day sounds.

By my calculations, I was now over the westernmost suite. I stopped and rested and listened. Not much noise from below, now. A muffled male voice sounded from ahead. I moved on, listening hard. The top stringer of a drywall partition

passed. I was nearly at the end now, and over a corner office. The voice was louder, braying on in a monologue; sure sounded like Ron, probably on the phone. A corner office, as befit the boss. Made sense.

I lowered myself to a seated, crosslegged position on the dusty beam, propping my feet on a two by six joist that ran fifteen feet to the outside wall opposite me, bisecting the office below me and supporting, by means of wires, the aluminum grid which in turn held the white acoustical ceiling tiles and fluorescent light fixtures. The voice carried on with abrasive financial mumbo-jumbo. I was now certain that friend Ron was alone, talking on the phone. No Ginny. Not yet.

Fluttering and chirping came from the cinder block wall across from me. I directed my light there and saw the bright beady eyes and black shape of some kind of bird. Starling, most likely. It squawked and a chorus of peeps answered. A nest, a God-damned starling nest. She hopped and fluttered to the joist and sat there, a man's length from me, squawking, head pivoting jerkily. Beat it, lady, I thought anxiously; I'm not going to bother you or your little brats. Get lost.

She did no such thing. Instead she leaped and swooped

straight at me with a kamikaze cry. I ducked and waved my arm, swatting blindly at her. She circled me and shot back over to her nest and danced there on one leg and then another, as if she had to relieve herself, screaming bird curses. I almost went for my .45—I don't take that kind of language from anybody—but decided that shooting her would be impractical. Instead I shut off my forehead lamp and sat as still as I could. She calmed down. Probably forgot I was there. No Rhodes scholar, that bird. Good.

Ron finished his call and immediately began another. Otherwise, all was dead silent. Fun should be starting any time, if it was going to start at all. Time to get into position. I edged and twisted myself onto the two by six joist and, carefully holding my feet above the acoustical ceiling tiles, slid along, an inch at a time, toward the center of the office. It was tight, tense, very delicate work; there in the pitch black, trying to keep my balance, moving my two hundred pounds as quietly as I could to the ideal position, directly over the center of Ron's office. The minute the trouble started, all I had to do was kick the tiles through and then drop down, ten feet to the floor or seven feet to the desk. Talk

about element of surprise. Evening, folks!

Just as I reached the center, I heard a couple of muffled popping sounds. Sounded like Styrofoam cups being squashed, somewhere in the building. Ron hung up his phone. A woman's voice came, almost making me jump. "Hi."

"Well, hi there, Gin," Ron said smoothly.

"Got a little surprise for you."

"Oh yeah? What's that?"

"Here."

Then a loud, flat POP. Silence, then I heard the creak of a chair. "Isn't this nice?" Ginny said gaily. Oh yeah, I thought. Champagne. Buttering up the boss, huh, gal? Well, good for you. Just be careful.

No more voices. I pictured them sipping, smiling at each other. I wondered what Ron was thinking. My arms began to ache from the strain of holding myself absolutely still on the thin joist. Could be this was all for nothing, I thought. Maybe I did misunderstand Ron and everything's going to go lovey-dovey down there, with me up here in the pitch black, sweating and snorting dust, when I could be home sipping a cold one—

A chorus of baby birds sent up a hymn. Their mother shrieked and I heard wings. I swung my left fist blindly to-

ward the noise, ducking. She screamed from behind me, the wings huffed closer, and a sudden pain lanced my neck. She stuck me! The stinking bug-eatin' bitch *bit* me!

I bent and twisted convulsively, reaching for the injury. The joist moaned beneath me and I heard the distinct snap and groan of aged wood. A shadow of wings crossed my face. I swung ineffectually at the shape, the joist shredded and sagged and gave, and I tumbled forward, arms flung out, knees punching through the ceiling—wait a minute, this isn't the way I'd planned it—

The first thing I saw was a man with three eyes.

I was flat on my side atop a large mahogany desk. My knees and palms had taken most of the impact and were flat-numb. I blinked at the man's face, trying to banish the spots which were floating in my vision, and realized that the man, who was leaning back in a large executive chair, had originally had the standard issue of two eyes. What looked like a third was actually a bullet hole punched neatly above his nose.

I turned. Across the office stood a tall, young, permed brunette. She had a canvas bookbag strapped over one shoulder

and a silencer-equipped handgun in her left hand. Her other hand was invisible, her arm elbow-deep inside a wall safe. Her handsome freckled face was expressionless, her body still. I shoved myself off the desk as the woman, with deadly precision, swung her handgun toward me. *POP*. Fire threaded my hair. I landed on Ron's lap, rolling him back on his chair, tumbled to the floor behind the desk, and scrabbled toward some kind of safety beneath it, groping at my spine for my .45.

Must have lost it.

I wedged myself beneath the desk, face pressed against the desk's privacy screen, which ran down the front side to six inches above the carpet. In my panic I realized four things. First, the desk seemed to be solid wood, would probably stop whatever she was shooting. Second, it wasn't really raining; what I felt was my own blood, dripping on me from the underside of the desk, where it was spraying from the scalp wound she'd given me. Third, my safety was strictly temporary, because I was also trapped. And, fourth, she was moving toward the desk, intent on finishing me off.

Without thinking I stuck a hand below and beyond the privacy screen and swept out. Caught an ankle and yanked

viciously. Surprised and off-balance, the woman left vertical and came down with a hard thud, a pained grunt, and the muffled dance of metal that must have been her handgun. Good. I kept hold of her ankle and dragged her toward me, playing her like a shark. Her shoe was a blue Reebok with white stripes, topped by a white sock. I locked both hands around her ankle and pulled as hard as I could, doing hand-over-hand up her calf, intent on drawing her, if I could, through the six inch gap between the privacy screen and the floor. Blood, forced no doubt by terror and exertion, sprayed harder from my scalp wound.

That made me mad. I had her nearly to knee length now, and I forced my own knee under her ankle and bent her leg up the wrong way, pinching it with the underside of the privacy screen. She screamed and tugged and suddenly got some new and very powerful purchase. Despite my strength and fury, I felt her leg slipping away from me. I realized what was happening. She was bracing her other foot on the opposite side of the desk and pushing with all she had, using leverage that more than compensated for my superior strength. Much more of that and she'd get loose and get her gun, and if that hap-

pened it'd be dead duck for yours truly.

Her calf was slipping and had just about gotten away when the idea came to me from nowhere. I shoved her leg down onto the carpet, squirmed myself up, and planted my right knee on her ankle. She grunted and gasped, pulling with all her might against my weight, but for the moment I had her pinned. My back was braced against the underside of the desk, and I drew my left foot in under me and dug it into the floor and began pushing hard, upward, with my strong back and stronger legs, trying with all my might to send the desk flying toward the ceiling.

It didn't quite do that. Instead, it pivoted as if hinged on its front legs and fell forward onto the woman with a crash.

I lurched wobbling to my feet, gasping, my right hand planted on my gluey hair. Ginny lay only half visible beneath the shipwrecked desk, twitching, freckled face pasty white. Lightheaded and breathless, I weaved a dopey circle, my head warm, wet, and sticky under my hand. Nobody else around. No one but me and her. The floor was a chaotic landscape of shredded ceiling tiles and desk debris. I caught a glint behind me and saw, beneath the chair that bore Ron's lounging corpse,

my .45 automatic. Big help you are, I thought drunkenly. I retrieved it, then went to step over Ginny's torso and nearly tripped and just barely kept my feet. Her handgun—a .22 automatic, I saw now, tipped by that big bulky silencer—lay just a foot beyond her outstretched arm. I kicked it away to somewhere and was about to leave the office past the open wall safe when I swerved back and looked down at her gap-mouthed, panting face.

"I came here to save you. To save you!" I said.

She coughed and croaked something, but I was in no mood to listen. I turned and stomped out, bound for somewhere, a phone, I suppose.

The conference room beyond Ron's office was empty. The office past that was empty also, except for a middle-aged man sprawled across a cluttered desk, head bloodsoaked. I eyed him curiously while passing and entered the foyer, where a woman lay on her back, her chair tumbled across her corpulent body, blood soaking the carpet blackly all around her. Her eyes were wide open and vacant, her glasses askew, and across her stretched a phone cord, the receiver still clutched in her hand. From it issued a metallic voice: *Please hang up the phone. Please hang up the phone now.*

I stood unsteadily and stared down at her. Now I knew what those two POPs were that I'd heard before Ginny had paid her visit to Ron. She'd gotten tired of waiting for these people to leave.

I pried the phone from the woman's cool hand, hit the cradle button, then dialed 911.

The suite was all mutters, cigar smoke, snap of camera flash, and professional feet trudging in and out, in and out. I sat in a chair, leaning back, my hand pressing a wad of paper towel against my throbbing head. Before me, propped against the edge of a desk, was the natty, stocky Captain Elvin Dance, chief, homicide squad, Detroit police. His three-piece suit was luminous green, his tie a smoldering red, his dark hair shaved close, and his clean-shaved skin the rich black of the best coffee. Next to him stood an anonymous mustached uniform braced in perfect parade rest.

Elvin was taking no notes. I had the feeling he'd remember this one for a while. "So, you staked yourself out up in the attic, figuring on saving this chick, and meanwhile she whacks her boss and the two others, too. Right?"

"Uh-huh." I'd left out the part about the bird. Dance and his

cronies had enough to laugh about that night. "Nearly got me, too," I said, not looking for sympathy, just wondering if he'd noticed my head injury.

"You done took care of that, though," Dance noted.

"Hero," the uniform said.

"Good thing there was a desk handy," Dance observed. "Interesting choice of weapon. I been in this business twenty years, first time I ever seen a perp get desked."

"Resourceful," the uniform said.

"May be a problem bagging it for evidence," Dance grinned.

A couple of paramedics strode by. The stretcher between them bore Ginny, blanketed, strapped down, and unconscious. Elvin asked, "She gonna live?"

"Looks that way," the lead paramedic answered. "Won't be walking for a while, though. Both knees are crushed."

"Pity," the uniform said.

Elvin whistled as the paramedics disappeared through the door. "You *do* got good taste, Perkins. You don't waste your time trying to save no ugly chicks."

"Pulchritudinous," the uniform said.

Elvin scratched his head. "You know, think I'll run her stats by the National Crime Information Center people. Betcha she's got a pro sheet."

"Had moves," I said, each word painful. "Didn't strike me as a typist who up and went berserko or something."

"PMS?" the uniform asked.

Elvin squinted. "Take the weapon. Twenty-two auto ain't unheard of, but silencers, you don't pick those up at your local K-Mart while shopping for socks."

Another giddy rush passed over me. I shut my eyes and breathed hard, wanting to be gone. When I could see again, a detective was standing next to Dance, holding Ginny's bookbag. "Looka this, captain. Looks like over a hundred grand here."

"Mazuma!" the uniform said.

"Whaddya think, Charlie?"

Dance asked the detective.

The hefty man hooked the bookbag strap over his shoulder. "I looked over some of the paperwork. Looks like they were running one of those commodity broker operations outta here. You know, wheat, soybeans, pork bellies, and stuff." He swaggered out, for the moment a rich man.

Dance grinned and eyed me. "Yeah. Makes sense. This is one of them boiler-room places. I've read about them. They make their sales, send couriers out to pick up the bread in cash. Most likely a scam. It's been done other places, never in Detroit, far as I know."

I licked my lips. "Ties in. I heard the boss and his partner talking about other cities they'd worked before this."

"Yeah," Elvin drawled, "milk it dry, then fold up and split before people catch on."

"Only this time, the boss had to start fooling around with the help," I said.

"And *this* help," Elvin said, jerking a thumb, "got wise to the scam, prob'ly had some experience of her own, and decided to cash in. Or out. Except—"

"Gumshoe," the uniform said.

"Exactly right, Mac," Dance answered. "They didn't know a Detroit private detective was lurking up in their attic. Ha ha, hee hee. Laugh's sure on them, ain't it, Perkins."

"I'm just convulsed, Elvin."

Elvin's dark eyes were on me speculatively. "How long we been tangling, Perkins? Fifteen years? You sure have a talent for tripping over crime."

"Kinda just sorta tends to happen," I said.

Elvin let the desk go and stood. "Well," he said, shoving his chunky hands into his coat pockets, "we'll round up that partner and have the fine-print boys go through all this paperwork, see what was going down. Betcha we'll find out they're from somewhere else, all right." He glared at me. "As if we don't

grow enough crime of our own in this town."

I got to my feet very, very slowly. Brought my rag down from my head, inspected it, put it back. "Through with me?"

"Oh hell yeah," Elvin said. "We through all right, you're clean and green. Just be in my office tomorrow morning at eight, so we can get your statement."

Eight tomorrow, I thought. Great. I licked my lips and started turning for the door.

"Hey," Elvin said, "you all right, Perkins?"

I looked back at him. "Think I need stitches."

"You ain't gonna faint or nothing, are you?"

"No. I'll get it took care of."

"Bourbon," the uniform said.

"Definitely."

I trudged to the door. As I pushed myself through, I heard Elvin Dance say angrily, "Listen, Mac, I ever tell you you're too damn yappy? Work on toning down the motor mouth, it ain't professional."

The evening was inky black and, for November, bitter cold. I rounded the corner from Plymouth Road onto Ohio Street and pounded along, my shoes crunching broken glass and kicking litter. A mufferless Camaro bayed smokily by. A woman screamed happily from an upstairs apartment across the street. A gaggle of bearded leather-jackets partied past me, exchanging a bottle and loud one-liners. A Detroit police cruiser swept over toward the curb, shined its spotlight on me briefly, then roared away. I stomped along, concentrating on staying vertical, thinking about how sick I get of this work sometimes.

At Northwest Hospital, on West Chicago, they shaved a spot as big as a grown man's palm off my head, cleaned the injury, and then, prior to putting in the stitches, administered a series of shots.

The first one was agony, the rest just hurt like hell.

FICTION

Bantam Rooster



by Hal Shaffer

I remember the second of June, 1935, as if it were yesterday. That was the date Babe Ruth quit the Boston Red Sox and retired from baseball. It was also the day my best friend, Ralph Schwartz, nearly killed himself.

I can recall the hot streets, the palm trees standing motionless, the crickets shrilling in the brown grass. I raced my bike across town to Ralph's two story white house at the end of Manzanita Lane and rang the bell. "Just a minute!" a voice called. There was the heavy tread of footsteps and a lock sliding back. Then Mrs. Schwartz's large oval face was looking out at me. "Hello, David."

"Hi," I said. "Is Ralph okay?"

"He's fine. Would you like to come in?"

A stout, matronly woman, Mrs. Schwartz turned and led me into the vestibule. "If you'll wait here a minute, I'll see if he's awake." She trod upstairs and left me in the cool stillness of the house. A grandfather clock ticked steadily in the living room. Faint lines of afternoon sunlight slipped through the Venetian blinds. I lifted my cap, wiped the sweat on my face. A minute or two and she was back. "You can go up now if you like."

I bounded up the stairs, hur-

ried to the last room along the corridor, knocked sharply, and pushed open the door. "Ralph?"

"Hi, Davey."

He sat atop the bed, his back propped against two pillows. He was a short, muscular boy with dark red hair and a deep tan from delivering groceries. The cast on his right leg had already been signed by two students in Miss Busoni's eighth grade class.

"I heard you fell out of a tree at Miller Park," I said.

"Yeah, I slipped coming down."

As he talked, I looked first at the new white cast and then out the window at Miller Park. Two blocks away a row of cottonwoods stirred in the warm wind, their tallest sections rising forty to fifty feet in the air. I thought of the dry branches and those parts of the trees that, for no reason at all on still summer days, abruptly broke off, thundering to the ground. The bigger limbs, stretching upward in constantly splitting Y's, looked too far apart, too steep for anyone to climb.

Ralph was talking about the X-ray machine at Santa Teresa Hospital when I felt myself start.

Tied to the topmost limb of the highest cottonwood, I could make out his red bandanna.

June faded, and his feat assumed less Olympian proportions. In July his conquering pennant disappeared in a spasm of wind. Then August arrived, hot and blind with heat. The cast came off, and Ralph and I took to riding our bikes to the river. For the second time that summer he surprised me. On weekends the current buoyed dozens of canoes and slow-paddling tourists downstream. Kids my age would perform stunts on the narrow shoreline. Sam Hawthorne, the best of our group, did one-armed handstands and even an occasional back flip if an adult promised a nickel or a soft drink in return.

At Ralph's command, Bob Martin and I worked feverishly all of one Saturday. From the time the grass was still bright with dew until the noonday sun blistered our necks, we helped him construct a plywood ramp near a twenty foot bluff, overlooking the river. Five or six times Ralph went down to the beach, his eyes measuring drop and distance for a jump. What worried me wasn't the shore. That was ten to twelve feet wide, and I knew he'd clear it. The problem was the river. It was shallow for another seven or eight feet before it took a sudden, deep drop. In my mind I was already envisioning the

twenty feet of beach and river shelf he would have to clear. Perhaps my own fascination for the event or, perhaps, a stubborn conviction that he would never really do it kept me from saying anything to his parents.

On Sunday Ralph, Bob, and I pushed the plywood frame to the very edge of the cliff. For the better part of an hour, Ralph made practice runs on a fenderless bike. He whipped the Schwinn back and forth over the hardpan earth with the dexterity of an acrobat. At last he marked off a line a hundred feet behind the ramp. Then I was sent down to the river to solicit passing tourists. "Hey, ya wanna see a kid jump his bike off the bluff?" I called out.

I shouted the proposition to likely looking prospects. In my mind there were boys just out of high school who—although they were accompanied by their girls—still might not be too opposed to see a kid risk his neck for a nickel. An hour crept by. A small gang of kids gathered impatiently on the beach. Then I spotted a canoe with two older men, perhaps in their mid-thirties, accompanied by an attractive younger woman. Both men wore straw hats, white shirts, and pants held up with suspenders. They passed a bottle of beer back and forth. I made my pitch. "Have your buddy jump

his bike!" the man in the bow said, his face a bright red from the sun.

I called up to Bob Martin who had positioned himself beside the ramp. He wheeled, said something, turned back and shouted: "Okay! . . . He's gonna do it!"

I waited, the seconds marching on with somnolent slowness, the river flashing in the sun. Then Ralph exploded onto the ramp. There was the heavy thrum of tires on wood, followed by a sudden silence. The bike sailed into the air. He arched over the river, poised against the sky. For an instant I could see his jeans and white cotton T-shirt as he stood up on the pedals. Then he dropped. Plummeted, actually. He kicked the bike away, trying to distance it from himself. The last moments he fell with his arms pinwheeling crazily and a cry wrenching from his lips like "Jeessssuu—" I think everyone on the beach heard the deep *chug!* and saw the cannonburst of white water and watched as he vanished under the surface. Then the only sound was the uneven patter of waterdrops. I glanced at the guys in the canoe. Their faces had gone paper white.

How much time passed? Five seconds? Ten? I don't know. Maybe it only seemed he was under far longer than he should

have been. Thoughts whirled through my mind. I pictured Ralph unconscious, drifting slowly along the mossy bottom, his body becoming increasingly impossible to find. I was still staring at the river when he came up in a burst of white spray. He stumbled out of the water, grinning and holding his back. "Hey, kid!" one of the guys in the canoe yelled. I turned to see a quarter glittering in the air before it landed on the beach in front of me.

Ralph went back on other Sundays. But I never did. Once was enough. And he never did anything more that stunned me—at least not for a long time.

In high school I was a good if uninspired student, pulling down mostly B's and enrolling in math and science. "You've got to take a lot of math, Davey, if you want to be an engineer," my father would tell me. That first autumn I watched with pride and a small green worm of envy as Ralph became a starter on the freshman football team. From the beginning, the best athlete in our class was clear.

The thing I remember about him during the next few years was an almost imperious physical courage. He made the varsity football squad as a sophomore. There were bigger and faster players in our

class—Matt Delgado, for one—but Ralph won a starting position because of the way he carried the ball. For him every play was full speed ahead, damn the torpedoes! In our second game of the season, a Friday afternoon match with St. James, he took a handoff and sprinted into the line, knees churning like Jesse Owens'. Afterwards Coach Akins and our manager helped him off the field.

The following Monday in sophomore English Linda Kirney asked if he had been badly hurt. Ralph turned in his seat, opened his mouth, removed a piece of bridgework, and offered us a gaping smile with a newly missing incisor. The next week he was back on the team, sprinting up the sidelines as if all our lives depended on it.

While he lettered in football and wrestling, his passion was for spring and diving. Half-gainers, jackknives, back flips, all looked easy when Ralph strolled out to the board and showed us how to do them. The wonder of it was that someone so short and squat could make everything flow with such grace. He won the valley diving championship his last two years. Once and only once, when I was a senior, did he coax me up onto the ten meter platform, thirty-two feet nine inches above the pool. Fearful of heights, I felt

a cool sweat break out on my hands. The dark blue water telescoped back and looked terrifyingly distant. For an instant I contemplated climbing back down those wet wooden steps. Then Ralph was clapping me on the back and grinning maniacally. "Come on, Davey," he reminded me, "I thought you said anybody could dive off the platform."

"Yeah . . . yeah," I said, my voice barely audible.

I walked out to the edge again, felt the wind chaffing my legs, a ball of fear growing in my throat. A few kids swam laps along the sides of the pool or talked or lay sunning themselves on the cement bleachers. Nobody seemed interested in the diving platform. Directly below, glistening white floats held up blue and white ropes that sectioned off the diving end. No swimmers occupied the immediate area.

"So what're you waiting for?" Ralph asked with maddening pleasantness.

Most guys, I suppose, would have stood at the edge of the redwood planking, taken a breath, and jumped. *Geronimo!* For some reason I needed a running start. Perhaps it was because when I reached the edge, I knew I couldn't stop. I went down with my legs splayed out, and my arms wavering before

me in what I hoped suggested a diving pose. Then something hard rapped me in the forehead. And maybe I hadn't shut my eyes soon enough because it felt as if they were being ripped out of their sockets. When I surfaced, I heard Ralph's high, chortling laugh filling the air.

One more incident stands out to me our senior year. It was a Saturday in April or May, and Ralph and I were sitting under a palm tree at the front of the school. The afternoon sun threw lengthening shadows across the lawn when a model-T rattled to the curb and stopped. Four guys our age got out and strolled toward us. I recognized Johnny Lensford, the one in front. He was a big mountain kid and he planted himself in front of us, his grinning buddies grouping around him, and he announced very simply: "We need money for the movies."

Certainly, I was happy to comply. My fingers felt for the wallet in my back pocket. What were a few dollars compared to a missing tooth or a blackened eye? Ralph, however, had other ideas. Standing up, neck muscles corded, fists balled, he reminded me of a bantam rooster. It was an act of sheer bravado. I was sure Lansford could have beaten him badly. And I think Lansford knew it too. Yet, there was something else that ra-

diated out of Ralph. It was an attitude of: *You can beat me up, but, when it's done, you're not gonna look so pretty yourself.* So they stood there, squared off, staring at each other, until Johnny Lansford blinked. Then Johnny threw back his head and bellowed laughter at us and allowed as how it was all a joke, that he'd never intended to take our money at all. Ralph and I watched as they filed back across the lawn, a tight little pack, getting into their Ford and roaring off up Main Street.

The summer of 1939 drifted by with suspended slowness as I read the papers and pondered Germany's next move. In August Bob Martin went to M.I.T. on a scholarship and my folks sent me to Dartmouth and Ralph stayed in Santa Teresa as head clerk at Schwartz's Grocery.

"I've got to help Dad, Davey," he said the day before I took the train east. Then he added, "Maybe next year." But the following year the eastern schools that held out scholarships didn't offer enough to make attending possible. So Ralph stayed on. And another year filed by.

In December, 1941, while I was home for Christmas a week after Pearl Harbor, my father told me Ralph had volunteered for the Army Air Corps. Mr. Schwartz, however, had been in and out of the hospital several

times with a heart condition and had written to the Santa Teresa draft board. Despite his protests, Ralph was given a hardship deferment and classified 4-A. He spent the war at the grocery.

In June of 1942, I volunteered for the service and drew the army. I saw little action, being stationed in Oxford, England, as a clerk-typist until late 1944. In November I was shipped south and arrived in time to join the Third Army and witness the Battle of the Bulge. Ironically, I met up with Johnny Lansford in the Belgian village of Mertelange. The last time I saw him, he was running toward a stone fence alongside the road, a BAR clutched in his right hand, the snow dusting his brown army coat, the fog so thick you could barely tell enemy or friend.

Then the war ended and we came home and the 1940's swept on like a swiftly flowing river. For the ten year high school reunion, Tina Corb and Vic Walters painted a thirty foot green and yellow sign—*Welcome Class of '39!* It hung like an overripe fruit in the ballroom of the Blue Lake Country Club. The band played "Sentimental Journey," "Stardust," "I'm in the Mood." I danced with girls who were now women, and I heard about successes ("Hey, you know Olivia Morris sold a novel to Scrib-

ner's?") and failures ("Well, Dave, Ralph Schwartz is still running that little grocery down on Third Street.").

Dusk was gathering and the band had swung into "Red Sails in the Sunset" when I strolled outside to the patio. Sprinklers chattered water over the grass. Beyond the golf course, new tract homes marched up the ridge. I saw Ralph, cigarette in hand, leaning over the railing and talking to Pokey Harris at the end of the patio. He straightened up. "Davey!" he called. "Davey, my god!" He lumbered forward, hand out, looking heavier, paler, strikingly older. Sharp lines had cut across his face. His hair was thinner. "So, what've you been doing?" he asked, clapping me on the back.

When I told him, he seemed surprised, then pleased that I'd chucked engineering (my father's dream), had been lured by the siren of journalism, and now worked as a reporter on the Long Beach Mirror.

"You know, I envy you," he said. "I've thought of leaving this place so many times. Of just getting in the car and never coming back."

"Why don't you?"

"Nah, Davey, I'm married, I've got a kid, Dad's in a nursing home... I'll never leave Santa Teresa."

"Sell the store."

"Sure, sure," he answered, a brittle smile flickering on his mouth. "And do what? . . . No, I'll be in that place forever."

The next day the reunion ended with a picnic. I headed my oil-burning Buick back to the sprawl of Los Angeles, and I forgot about Ralph Schwartz. Or at least I forgot the person I'd seen. I suppose I wanted to remember him the way he once was.

Then the years began to race past. I thought of the old Ralph—the only one I allowed to exist—as I debated taking a chance at a larger paper (more money, less security). He swam to mind again when I'd collected enough material to write my first novel—which meant leaving a salaried job while my wife was pregnant. And he was there again when the largest paper in Northern California offered me a three month trial shot at city editor.

Pure Gold, my third novel, was climbing toward success in the paperback market when our twentieth reunion came. After months of discussion our class's social committee decided we should meet in San Francisco. They booked the Sutter, a grand old hotel on Union Square, at discount rates. At exactly six P.M., on Saturday, June 16, 1959, I was guiding Pokey Harris across the dance floor. Step, slide, step, slide. As

we half-glided, half-lurched our way past the ten-piece band, a hand clasped my shoulder. I turned to see Ralph. Dark hollows had etched themselves under his eyes. Dressed in an ill-fitting brown suit, he was bald and chunky and the wary look of ten years ago had turned into something frightening. "Davey?" he said. He shook my hand and barely met my eyes. "Let's go someplace where we can talk, huh?"

We stepped outside and strolled the streets. His talk was rambling. Disjointed. Increasingly rapid. "The big corporations, Davey, that's who you've got to watch! The chain stores are squeezing the little guy out . . . an independent like me doesn't have a chance any more. . . . Did I tell you I filed for bankruptcy in March? . . . Yeah, the store's gone, and here I am thirty-eight years old. They took my house, my savings, my business. And what am I going to do? Huh? Can you tell me that? I got no training in anything else . . . and my kid . . . my kid wants to go to college. But where am I gonna get that kind of money? You know what a good college costs these days? I tell you, Davey, it's all turned to ashes."

We walked into Golden Gate Park where low, slanting beams of light struck through the trees. Further west we wandered along

Park-Presidio Boulevard. Then we reached Land's End, and I heard the Pacific thunder against the cement sea wall as the westering sun beat the ocean to gold.

An ardent walker, I had enjoyed our westward trek of three or four miles. It was only when we were far out on the Golden Gate Bridge itself that I was struck by our destination. By now the commuter traffic had ebbed, the sky was a deepening blue, the bridge strangely quiet except for the soft creaking of the steel I-beams. Even as I looked at Ralph, he seemed to sense my dawning awareness. We stared at each other. Motionless. And then in a single fluid move, he was up and across the siding. He balanced precariously on the edge, holding the guard rail and looking down. Below, a sailboat, no bigger than a toy, tacked east.

"Ralph!" I shouted.

His voice was toneless: "I should have done this a long time ago, Davey."

"Ralph, don't!" Even before my plea had finished, he was gone. I watched him drop with dizzying swiftness. For a second I had the impression he was flying. Coat billowing out behind him, he kept his legs together, his arms thrust out straight, left hand locked over right thumb, head tucked. It was a perfect dive. He raced

away from me, growing smaller, smaller . . . smaller . . . *Why didn't he hit? . . . My god, how long did it take? . . .* Smaller still . . . a blurred gray shape now. Momentarily, I thought I saw a shadow racing west across the water to meet Ralph at a point directly below me. There was a sudden soundless flash of white water.

"Ralph! Oh, my god, Ralph! . . ." I heard myself say. Then a hand closed on my arm and a pallid, lined face thrust itself in front of me. The man wore a gray jogging suit. "Jumped?" he croaked. "He jumped?" Above us the wind sang in the steel struts.

The Jefferson Life Insurance Company paid out survivors' benefits. Handsomely. Leslie went to Bryn Mawr, a fine four year college in Pennsylvania. And she had enough left to set up a business when she graduated. Elliot Schwartz, Ralph's father, was wheeled around the Baylor Convalescent Hospital by a private nurse until he died a year and a half later. Ralph's mother remarried. And Ralph's wife bought a new home off the Blue Lakes Country Club and learned to play golf.

All that was twenty-eight years ago. My son and daughter are out of college now and supporting themselves. I've moved up

to managing editor, and the kid who thumps my lungs and puts a frozen stethoscope to my chest says that since my heart attack (a mild one) I've got to slow down. I've done well, too. I've lost thirty pounds, thrown away the cigarettes, and discovered the pleasures of gardening. Some days, however, things happen that send the old ticker banging around like a broken clock spring. Sunday I was sitting in the den, an ice cold beer in one hand, a *T.V. Guide* in the other when I saw Ralph Schwartz on Channel Thirteen.

What happened was this: The picture zoomed in on a tide pool at the base of a cliff and focused on a seventeen- or eighteen-year-old kid who looked exactly

like Ralph. He was a Mexican boy with a shock of black hair and lustrous brown eyes but, still, the face was the same. I watched him climb up out of the water and onto a gray granite rock. He had the same short, squat, muscular body; the same easy gait. Leaning forward, uncertain, I watched until he smiled. And then I knew. Looking at the broad, crooked grin, I knew I was looking into the face of Ralph Schwartz's son.

Since then I've lain awake nights wondering and thinking about things. And what I think is that next July, during the International Cliff Diving Championships in Acapulco, Mexico, my wife and I are going south to look up an old friend.

Important Notice to Subscribers: All subscription orders and mail regarding subscriptions should be sent to P.O. Box 1932, Marion, O. 43305. For change of address, please advise 6 to 8 weeks before moving. Send us your current mailing label with new address.

FICTION



Roughing It

by Michael Beres

The motor home was a class A, at least a thirty footer with twin rear axles. It swayed majestically on its air shocks as it lumbered into the campground, steering its way along the narrow, one-way graveled path, missing trees on either side by mere inches. It drove slowly to the far reaches of the camp beneath the shade of closely grouped oaks. The yellowed leaves of the oaks gave the site a golden tint, the abundance of trees and the overcast sky summoning a premature dusk. The motor home parked in a narrow site between two small tents. In the distance, where most campers had set up closer to the restrooms, orange fire flickers winked.

"They've got a lot of nerve. All those empty spots and they've got to park that damn thing right between the only two tents out here."

"Don't get so upset, dear. They've got all the right in the world to take whichever site they prefer. Besides, there's no electricity on these sites so at least we won't have to listen to someone's air conditioner all night."

Fred and Renee sat in their lawn chairs near the fire, keeping off the autumn chill. Fred poked at the fire with an empty hot dog stick while he stared at the motor home.

"Fine thing, our first camping trip without the kids and that thing probably has a dozen brats inside who'll explode out of there any second."

"What's that round thing on top?" said Renee. "Look, it's turning."

"It's the damn directional TV antenna," said Fred.

"But if they don't have electricity—"

Then it happened. A gasoline generator hidden behind one of the panels on the motor home's lower flank coughed and sputtered into life.

"I don't believe it," said Fred.

"We could always move," said Renee.

"No," said Fred. "I want to watch this. I'd like to see what kind of clowns would park a motor home bigger than our damn house back here in this so-called primitive area."

"I didn't see them driving. Did you?"

"No. The windows are too heavily tinted."

"I suppose they have to come out eventually."

But no one came out of the motor home. Fred had several beers, Renee had one. They made baked potatoes in foil and hot dogs. They finished eating and alternated their trips to the restrooms

so one could keep watch and still no one came out.

As he sat in the dark, Fred stared at the windows of the motor home. Lights were on but curtains were drawn at every window. Occasionally he saw a shadow pass in front of the windows; at the same time he noticed that the motor home swayed noticeably, not as much as it would when driven but it did sway.

"They must be real porkers in there," said Fred.

Renee was knitting at the picnic bench under the light of their lantern. "Why do you say that?"

"Because when they move around in there the whole thing tips. Maybe they can't fit out through the door. Maybe that's why they don't come out."

"Or," said Renee in a whisper, "maybe they're disabled. Did you ever think of that?"

"Hey. Wait. The door's opening."

And the door did open. It opened just enough to allow a small dog to come out. The dog was light colored, and in the dim light from the other campfire on the far side of the motor home, Fred could see it cross under the motor home and sniff around. Then the dog disappeared into the dark undergrowth at the rear of the site.

A few minutes later Renee let out a yelp because the small dog had crept up on her. "He scared the daylight out of me."

"Aw, he's just looking for a handout. Come here, boy."

Fred got a hot dog out of the cooler, gave half to the dog, who ate it quickly then headed back to the motor home. Fred whistled and made clicking sounds with his tongue. He offered the rest of the hot dog but the dog would not come back. Then the door of the motor home opened a few inches and the dog jumped inside.

That night in their tent, ensconced within their zip-together sleeping bags, Fred and Renee further speculated about the occupants of the motor home. They spoke of kidnappers with their victim locked up inside. They spoke of ghosts and wondered if, since houses could be haunted, why not motor homes.

Sometime in the middle of the night the generator turned off. A little while later Fred heard footsteps in the weeds. The footsteps encircled the car, then the tent. He imagined someone with an ax outside the tent circling in for the kill. He was afraid to make a sound or to move for fear he'd awaken Renee and she'd make the sound that would bring the ax blade down upon them. But the footsteps moved off, crunched on the gravel for some distance, then went back into the weeds in the direction of the motor home, perhaps beyond it.

He did not sleep for the remainder of the night because he kept hearing footsteps and a sound like something heavy being dragged along the ground in the direction of the motor home. Finally he thought he heard the click of a door. Then all was silent.

Fred woke Renee at dawn and they were gone before sunrise. They drove west, farther from the crowds at all the modern campgrounds. Fred consulted the camping directory while Renee drove.

After a stop for lunch a state patrol car pulled them over. The trooper said there had been an incident at the last campground they were at. The police had gotten the license numbers of everyone who had camped there. The trooper had Renee and Fred follow him to a nearby state police headquarters.

A thin, sleepy-eyed sergeant questioned them.

"Did you see anything unusual besides the motor home?"

"No."

"And all you heard were footsteps?"

"Yes. That's all. Now please tell us what this is about. Was someone murdered or something?"

"What makes you say that?"

"I don't know. I just figured it had to be serious for you to trace all those campers."

"No. No one was killed as far as we know. But it seems a pair of campers, a young man and woman, have disappeared. Their tent and equipment and car are still there, but the couple's gone. They were the ones parked on the other side of that motor home."

"Didn't you get the motor home's license number?"

"No. It seems they came in late and didn't register."

That night Fred and Renee stayed at a campground in a wilderness area farther off the main roads. The camping directory said the campground had no electricity or water hookups for motor homes. When they arrived they didn't even have to sign in. They just picked a site with a picnic table and made camp along with about three other tenters spread evenly in the camp so that no one was within fifty yards of anyone else.

"This is more like it," said Fred as he sat in front of the fire sipping a beer. "This is what camping is all about."

"I still think you should have told the police you heard someone dragging something."

"Yeah, and we would've still been there. They would've brought

in pictures of different kinds of motor homes and made me reconstruct the damn thing. No, my vacation is too important to spend it at a police station. Besides, we never saw anything except their dog, and if they did do something to that couple, it's too late to do anything about it."

After stuffing themselves with two large steaks they had grilled over the fire, Fred and Renee sat in their lawn chairs and watched squirrels collecting acorns and storing them away for winter.

"That's how I feel," said Renee.

"What?"

"That squirrel on the tree over there by the outhouse is trying to stuff another acorn into a hole where it won't fit."

"Sure is peaceful here," said Fred.

"Sure is," said Renee as she reached over and patted Fred's gut.

After dusk a wind came up and acorns fell from the oaks in rushes that sounded like rain. The wind continued after Fred and Renee retired into their tent. Occasionally an acorn hit the tent and rolled down its slope. But later the wind died down and it was silent. Dead silent. It was silent until the sound of an engine and the sound of acorns popping under large tires came closer and closer.

Fred and Renee did not hear the engine or the acorns popping. They did not see the spotlight sweep across their tent. The heavy steak dinner and a bedtime brandy to celebrate their find of a peaceful campground unfettered by so-called modern conveniences had put them into a deep slumber. Later, after the sounds of the engine and popping acorns had ceased, they did not even hear the generator cough and sputter into life, and they did not hear the footsteps in the weeds.

On the other side of the campground, Chuck and Cindy, on their first camping trip in Chuck's jeep after their marriage two months earlier, were testing the integrity of their tent by kicking out sporadically at the side wall with their bare feet.

"Must you breathe so loud?" said Cindy between fairly deep breaths of her own.

"Don't worry," panted Chuck. "No one can hear us except the squirrels. And they're probably as busy as us."

But then Cindy heard something. "Wait. What was that?"

"What?"

"Wait, Chuck, will you? Listen."

It was a high-pitched sound. An animal sound. No, not an animal. "It's somebody screaming, Chuck."

"Aw, come on, Cindy. It's probably just a coyote or something."

"Do they have coyotes around here?"

"I don't know. I just couldn't think of any other animal."

"Listen. There it is again, only it's a different voice this time. Hear it? Someone's screaming. It's someone muffled or gagged and they're screaming."

Cindy did not want Chuck to leave her alone in the tent, but he insisted on having a look. He put on his jeans and sweatshirt and she also dressed even though she stayed behind.

While Chuck was gone Cindy listened but heard no more screams. When she heard footsteps in the weeds she thought it was Chuck. But the footsteps were light and rapid and she knew it was some kind of animal. When she finally did hear heavy footsteps she aimed the flashlight at the tent flap and saw first a hand, then a sleeve, then Chuck's great big grin.

"I didn't see anything," said Chuck, a little out of breath. "Nothing except a mile-long motor home. They've got a generator going and everything. We probably heard the TV or radio or something."

"You didn't see anyone outside at all?"

"No. Just a little puppy running around that I almost stepped on. Over by the motor home it smelled like they were cooking. When I walked past there was steam coming out of the stove exhaust vent."

"I'm scared, Chuck."

"Why?"

"Those screams. Even if it was a TV, it still scared me."

"Great," said Chuck as he hugged her. "Hey, I know. Tomorrow we'll go to a more remote place. Then there'll be no screaming."

"More remote than this?"

"Yeah. Not even outhouses."

Cindy kissed him, pulled his hair. "Boy, you really like to rough it, don't you?"

Outside the tent a small, light colored dog crept along in the weeds. The dog walked slowly and silently. Something rectangular was in the dog's mouth. The dog crept beneath the jeep that was parked nearby and lifted its head. When the dog came out from under the jeep its mouth was empty, and as it got farther from the jeep and the tent, it broke into a run toward a sliver of light at the open side door of the motor home.

At dawn Chuck and Cindy broke camp and left in their jeep. A little while later, when the sun was up, the only occupied sites in the camp were Fred and Renee's and the motor home parked next to them. But soon the engine on the motor home started and it lumbered out onto the acorn-strewn pathway. It stopped there, its driver pausing while the curious antenna loop on its roof circled twice before stopping and aiming. Then the motor home rolled forward, its springs creaking under its massive weight, and acorns popping like gunshots under its huge tires. Through the windshield, though it was heavily tinted, the outlines of two large figures could be seen in the driver and passenger seats, figures so large that it would have seemed impossible that they could get through the door of the motor home. Closer to the windshield, in fact right up on the dashboard, a small dog barked excitedly and pointed the way.

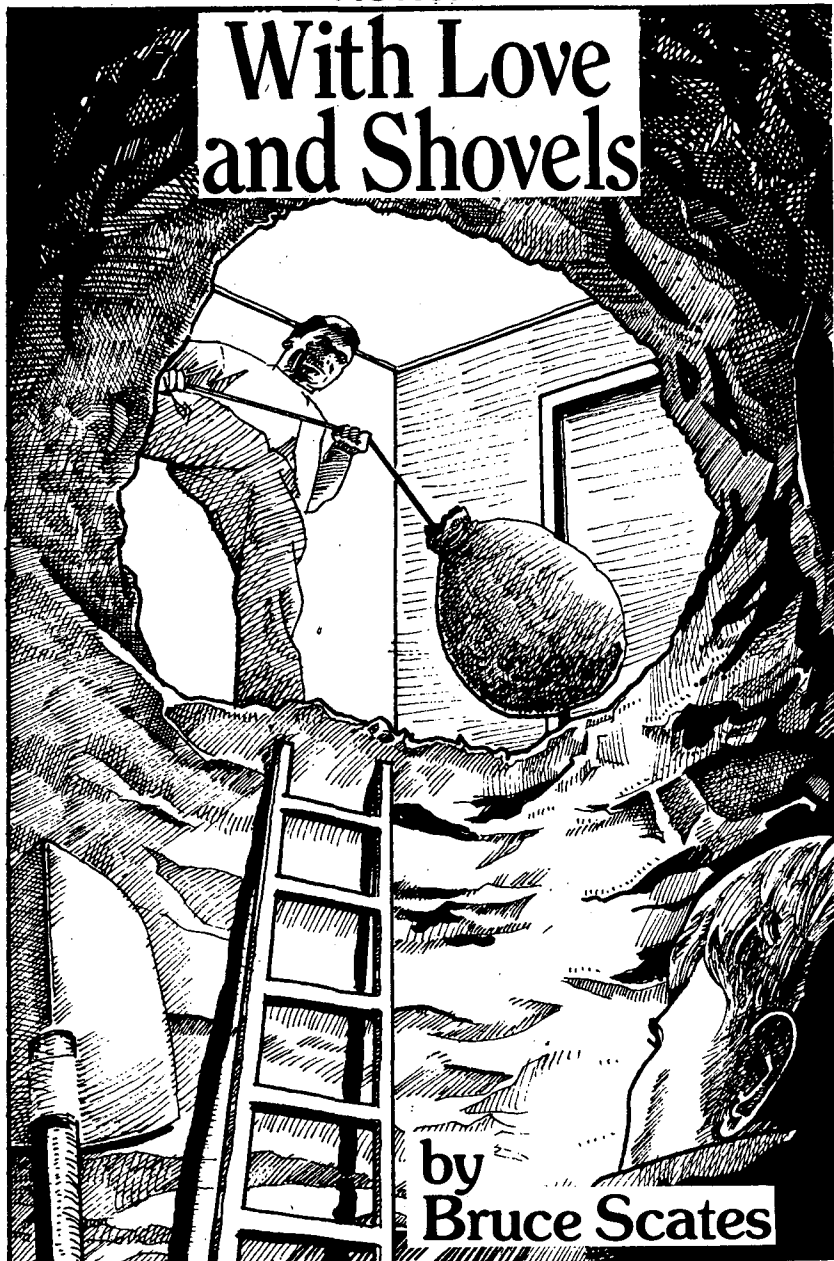
STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT AND CIRCULATION (Required by 39 U.S.C. 3685) 1. Title of Publication: Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine; Publication No. 00025224. 2. Date of Filing: October 1, 1987. 3. Frequency of Issue: Every 28 Days; (A) No. of Issues Published Annually: 13; (B) Annual Subscription Price: \$19.50. 4. Complete Mailing Address of Known Office of Publication: 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017. 5. Complete Mailing Address of the Headquarters or General Business Offices of the Publishers (not Printers): 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017. 6. Names and Addresses of Publisher, Editor and Managing Editor: Publisher: William F. Battista, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017; Editor: Cathleen Jordan, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017; Managing Editor: Lois Adams, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017. 7. Owner: Davis Publications, Inc., 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017; Davis Communications, Inc., 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017; Joel Davis, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017. 8. Known Bondholders, Mortgagees and Other Security Holders Owning or Holding 1 Percent or More of Total Amount of Bonds, Mortgages or Other Securities: NONE. 9. Extent and Nature of Circulation: Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months: (A) Total No. Copies Printed (Net Press Run): 312,478; (B) Paid Circulation: (1) Sales Through Dealers and Carriers, Street Vendors and Counter Sales: 27,411; (2) Mail Subscriptions: 198,609; (C) Total Paid Circulation: 226,020; (D) Free Distribution by Mail Carriers or Other Means Samples, Complimentary and Other Free Copies: 468; (E) Total Distribution (Sum of C and D): 226,488; (F) Copies Not Distributed: (1) Office Use, Left Over, Unaccounted, Spoiled After Printing: 4,202; (2) Returns from News Agents: 81,788; (G) Total (Sum of E and F—should equal net press run shown in A): 312,478. Actual No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date: (A) Total No. Copies Printed (Net Press Run): 316,540; (B) Paid Circulation: (1) Sales Through Dealers and Carriers, Street Vendors and Counter Sales: 28,000; (2) Mail Subscriptions: 200,963; (C) Total Paid Circulation: 228,963; (D) Free Distribution by Mail Carriers or Other Means Samples, Complimentary and Other Free Copies: 414; (E) Total Distribution (Sum of C and D): 229,377; (F) Copies Not Distributed: (1) Office Use, Left Over, Unaccounted, Spoiled After Printing: 7,233; (2) Returns from News Agents: 79,930; (G) Total (Sum of E and F—should equal net press run shown in A): 316,540. I certify that the statements made by me are correct and complete.

LAURA GUTH

CIRCULATION DIRECTOR, SUBSCRIPTIONS

FICTION

With Love and Shovels



by
Bruce Scates

Illustration by Jim Ceribello

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Jack Haxley peered through his binoculars. "I think he's digging a tunnel."

"Ummmmmgggghh."

From his second floor bedroom window Jack studied the house next door. It was five forty-five in the morning. The light was just bleaching into grayness.

"That's the tenth bag of dirt he's carried out to the garage. He takes it out early mornings and at night when nobody can see what he's up to."

"Except Eagle Eye Jack. And (yawn) Sleepless Eye Jack."

"The question is—where's he getting all that dirt from *inside* the house? Answer—he's knocked a hole in the basement floor and started digging."

"Smmmmmhooool."

"What?"

With a groan, Lucy Haxley rolled over in bed. She removed her pillow from her face. "I said *swimming pool*. He's digging his own indoor swimming pool. Or locks for the Panama Canal. Like in *Arsenic and Old Lace*."

"No, it can't be bodies—"

"—yellow fever victims. Those old ladies in *Arsenic* had eighteen."

"Those rumors about Bennie's being more than a used-car dealer are garbage. He only looks like a gangster. I've owed him fifty bucks for six months and he hasn't threatened

to break my legs yet."

"You owe everybody you ever met at least fifty bucks. You borrowed fifty bucks from a night nurse in the hospital four days after you were born, sweetness. You wanted to corner the under-the-bassinet pabulum racket."

"Very funny. . . . Maybe he's killed Bitsie."

"The not-so-little woman? He beat me to it."

"You know she's not my type, honey. You are."

Propping up her shrewd little monkey face with a hand, she gave him one of her sardonic smiles, and can't-be-fooled expressions. They always made Jack, who had a lot to fool her about, uneasy. She was a plain but wealthy woman of thirty; Jack was darkly handsome, admitted to thirty-seven, and was hopelessly romantic—to him, there was no such thing as an unattractive rich woman. He had made a lucrative career of proving it.

"Gotcha," said Lucy. "You prefer skinny brunettes with big bank accounts to *zaftig* blondes with insufficient deposits. Up here," she explained, tapping her head.

Yes—she made him increasingly uneasy. He would have to do something. He had long ago made the discovery that rich women invariably developed a

throbbing in their purses that made what he did for their other nearly as vital organs something that could be dispensed with. Along with him.

"But—why a tunnel?" Jack wondered. "To where?"

Jack studied the houses nearest to Bennie Finn's. First Dugan's. Then Potter's and Meyer's. Then . . . Jack froze, staring. Good God: *Compton House!* Looming aloof and massively Victorian behind its excluding wall. Inside: highly valuable collections of eighteenth and nineteenth century paintings, of silver and porcelain, of rare coins.

And all merely a hundred yards or so from Bennie Finn's house as the crow flies. Or the mole tunnels. . . .

Compton House was protected, of course. Alarms sealed the windows and doors, electrified wire topped the stone wall, cameras spied on the entrance gates. At night, dogs roamed the grounds.

But—nowadays—there was rarely anyone *inside* the house. That included its owner, the last family survivor, N.C. Compton. He appeared for a few weeks only in the spring and again in the autumn, his blue Rolls Royce gliding up the drive, then purring away till his next visit. Compton was a mystery: what did he look like, what did

he do inside Compton House? No one knew.

So Compton House was left abandoned ten months out of the year, its treasures guarded—above ground solely—by electronic gadgets, the dogs, and a gnarled old Scots gardener who lived in a cottage on the grounds.

"Was Compton weird even when you used to know each other as kids?" asked Jack.

"In a nice way. Gentle. Awkward. Always breaking his glasses. We went bird-watching together until his father sent him away to boarding school."

"*Bird-watching?*" Jack snorted. He returned his gaze to Compton House. "A tunnel. My God," he murmured, "*a tunnel.*"

When Jack, in the pre-dawn semi-darkness, whispered, "Need a hand?," the effect on Bennie Finn was like being tapped on the shoulder in a graveyard. While staggering with a sixty pound bag of dirt.

"GAAAAHHHHH!" bleated Bennie. Then: "Jesus—my back!" Knees buckling, he shoved the bag at Jack.

"Put it in the garage with all the others, right?" said Jack.

"Wait!" croaked Bennie. They stood by the side door to Bennie's garage, Bennie staring at Jack. "—hell you doing here,

Haxley?"

"Being neighborly. You need help, Bennie."

"—hell I do!"

"Right," said Jack. "Yours, I believe?"

Jack slung the bag of dirt back to Bennie. Bennie caught it with an "Ooooff!" He descended as if he'd just caught a down elevator.

Lying on the ground with the bag on top of him, Bennie wheezed: "Get-it-off-me! I can't . . . breathe!"

"You're sure you want help this time?"

In Bennie's kitchen Jack propped Bennie up with a can of beer. A meaty man in his late forties, Bennie had a somewhat less than life-sized head but a more than life-sized head of hair. Blond hair. Jack suspected it had been repossessed from a surfer, along with a '73 Corvette.

"Bennie," said Jack pleasantly, "don't waste any oxygen telling me you're raising mushrooms in your basement. You're taking a tunnel under state lines for the purpose of committing an immoral act. Why?"

Asking Bennie a question was like dropping a ball into a slow roulette wheel: the wheel spun and spun; eventually the ball stopped on something. Unexpectedly, this time it was on honesty.

"—the hell state lines? I'm

taking it under Compton's damn front yard! That's thanks to my sales being down and sales to Bitsie *aren't*. And digging to Compton's and kicking him right in the Rolls seemed safer than sticking up a bank and closer than tunneling to Fort Knox. Or that's what I thought. Hell with it. I'm quitting before my back's L-shaped or I gotta wear a truss."

"That's not the spirit of greed that made the used-car or the tunneling industries great, Bennie," remarked Jack. "You need a partner."

"Partner? That's what Bitsie calls herself. It means she color-coordinates my overalls with my hardhat and does her nails."

"What you need is a partner with driving greed, a strong back, short nails, and an expert knowledge of tunneling."

"The only thing you're an expert on is women and chiseling."

"I've seen *The Great Escape* four times, Bennie. Lead me to your tunnel."

A hole in the cement floor from which the ends of a ladder protruded. Near it a patio-type recliner under a sunlamp and, on the recliner reclining, a pink bikini filled to the brim with a blonde young woman who might have been Miss Anything She Wanted To Be. Instead she was Mrs. Finn. Bitsie.

As Jack climbed down the ladder after Bennie, Bitsie and he exchanged smiles of hundred-proof lasciviousness and greed.

It occurred once again to Jack that something really had to be done about his wife. And Bennie's. Down in the tunnel, it came to him exactly what. . . .

For eight hours a day: Swing pick. Jab shovel. Scoop dirt. Fill bags. Drag bags to tunnel entrance. Haul up to basement. Most of this done on their knees, or crouching in a tunnel that was four feet high, two and a half feet wide. Done in air that was thickly humid, stifling.

Sweat constantly soaked their coveralls. Their skin became a surface of sweat and grit.

Their shoulders ached. Also their backs, knees. Their hands, however, merely became numb.

Worst of all: *fear*. The sensation of suffocating while trying to breathe the foul tunnel air. Dread of the tunnel's narrow enclosed space, of the tons of dirt above their heads. Both men at times experienced the terrifying feeling that the walls were bulging inwards at them, the floor moving, the ceiling sagging. Sometimes Jack imagined that he had been swallowed inside some vast earthy monster. Or thought of the dirt as an immense pillow

about to be pressed down over his lips; eyes, nostrils. Chokingly. Suffocatingly.

Fear of being buried alive.

They fought it by thinking about pleasanter things. Bennie about Bitsie and money, and playing the horses and about money, and kicking Compton's Rolls in the trunk and about money. Jack thought about what he'd do with all that loot and what he'd do about Lucy. And what he'd do about and with Bitsie, and about what N.C. Compton did inside Compton House.

Neither man would have dreamed of working so hard at a regular job, and neither man had ever worked so hard at avoiding earning an honest living by hard work in his life.

The tunnel to Compton House, however, was a caper, a challenge, the answer to all their problems. Finally: an obsession.

But when the first week passed, they had managed to dig only thirty feet.

At an average of eight hours a day . . . it would take them, at that rate, thirty-eight days to reach Compton House.

Lucy Haxley was massaging Jack Haxley's back.

"And what are *you* doing while I'm out busting what I used to laughingly call my 'back,' trying

to earn a dishonest living?"

"Funnily enough, poor hubby dear, I've taken up bird-watching again."

It happened near the end of the twelfth day of digging. Jack was alone in the tunnel; Bennie was up in the basement, cutting more shoring.

Jack had just jabbed the shovel into the wall of dirt—mechanically, moving like a robot—when he heard a muffled rumbling. Dirt first trickled, then burst from the six foot section of unshored tunnel ceiling behind him. *Cavein!*

Stumbling with exhaustion and panic, Jack tried to scramble toward safety. Away from the dirt that was trying to trap him.

He was knocked down. It was like being tackled: he tumbled to the tunnel floor, his legs pinned. Frantically he clawed at the dirt with his gloved hands, screaming for Bennie. Expecting at any moment for the pillow to come crushing down over him.

But the fall of dirt behind him slowed, became a trickle, ceased.

Heaving desperately with back, arms, elbows, hands, Jack felt his legs move in the dirt. Sucking in air, he heaved again. . . .

"Bennie heard you," Bitsie whispered. "Calling for help down there. But the rat pretended he didn't. I think it's because he *knows*. About us, Jackie."

Remembering the nightmare, Jack said: "That makes two of you who didn't come rushing to help me—doesn't it, honey?"

"It's obvious," said Lucy Haxley. "You need someone who knows more about tunneling. And who's a crook like you, of course, my sweet."

"Where do I find him?" grumbled Jack. "Put an ad in the newspaper?"

"I've already got him. Tami's uncle. She talks about him all the time."

"Tami?"

"My hairdresser."

"Oh, God."

"We'll need a bigger wagon, mounted on rails, to haul the dirt through the tunnel, more lights strung all along the tunnel length, a pair of walkie-talkies to link the tunnel head with the basement. Also the shorings must be closer together. We'll work half hour rotating shifts. One man at the tunnel head digging, one man hauling the dirt, one man cutting the shoring."

"Yeah, *mon général*," growled

Bennie Finn sarcastically.

"Only a lieutenant, actually, Mr. Finn. Dishonorably discharged, if that will make you feel more comfortable," replied Tami the hairdresser's uncle. His name was Nick Chase: he was long, thin, wore glasses, was in his early forties and impervious to Bennie Finn.

"You actually tunneled out of that Vietcong POW camp?" said Jack Haxley.

"And ran like hell. Only I got caught again. This time by our side. But a court martial is a great improvement over a Vietcong prison camp." Chase's spectacles glinted. "*Partners*," he added.

"—the hell the army nail you for?" demanded Bennie.

"It may surprise you, Mr. Finn, but I was a thief. And once one, always one—don't you find?"

"Three of us doing the work makes a big difference. The tunnel's going a lot faster. And I'm not so tired at the end of a day."

Bitsie cuddled closer to Jack. "I noticed."

"The 'general' says only another week."

"That's not much time."

"Not for Bennie and Lucy."

"What about the general? He's a cool one."

"He doesn't count."

"You're so clever."

"More so than Bennie, certainly."

"And Lucy."

Jack flashed his Errol Flynn grin. "More ruthless, anyway."

"A wife is always curious about the place where hubby works. A *devoted* wife, anyway," said Lucy Haxley with one of her smiles. "My husband the tunnel digger."

It was the first time she had come to see the tunnel. It was the end of another day's digging. Nick Chase had already disappeared to wherever it was he disappeared to; Jack and Bennie, along with Bitsie, were slumped in the basement, cans of beer in their hands. Their tools had been removed from the tunnel.

"I'm too tired to conduct a guided tour," snapped Jack.

"I'll show myself around. I've got legs—not as good as Bitsie's, but self-propelling."

"Take a shovel along if your arms work too," said Bennie.

"I'll do that, Mr. Finn. And coveralls and a hardhat. And a walkie-talkie."

Lucy had been down in the tunnel only briefly when Jack used the walkie-talkie. "Be careful around the shoring. We don't want any accidents slowing us up." To himself he added:

At least until we've reached Compton's.

It was twenty minutes later that Lucy Haxley's voice crackled over the walkie-talkie: "There's been an accident, Jack."

Jack grabbed the walkie-talkie. "A cave-in? You stupid, clumsy bitch! I *warned* you! If you've messed up all our work, I'll—"

"—kill me, Jack? Oh, I don't think there's any need for that. Anyway, not yet. The place where I was digging tumbled down a bit, that's all. I got out of the way in time."

"Great. Now just—"

"And I found something, Jack."

"Found something?"

"They were lying in the dirt that caved in," continued Lucy's voice. ("I wonder what they are?" whispered Bitsie.) "I'll bring you out a couple."

Perhaps it was something in Lucy's voice—Jack, Bitsie, and Bennie were all standing by the hole in the basement floor when Lucy climbed up the ladder. She had one of the bags they used for hauling dirt.

"They were in a rotted old leather sack," announced Lucy. "Look."

She opened her palm: in it, dirty but nevertheless unmistakably yellow, a coin glinted. Wide-eyed, Jack snatched it from Lucy, Bitsie snatched it

from Jack, Bennie in turn snatched it from Bitsie. "*—the hell!*"

The three watched silently as Lucy reached into, removed another object from, the canvas bag. An unusually heavy object, shaped like a small brick. Grabbed from Lucy by Jack, rubbed feverishly with a rag, it shortly, like the coin, gleamed bright yellow. . . . *Gold!*

"Golly!" said Bitsie.

"—!" said Bennie.

"The Compton buried treasure!" cried Jack. "My God—all those stories of Nick's about the Comptons' hiding a fortune in gold during the Civil War were true!"

"There's more of it down there," said Lucy. "Bags and bags of it."

"Golly!" said Bennie.

"—!" said Bitsie.

Jack, Bitsie, and Bennie for an instant looked at one another. Then all three exploded for the ladder. Where they collided. Jack shoved Bennie; Bennie elbowed Bitsie; Bitsie screeched and aimed a kick at Jack. Somehow the trio all climbed or slid or tumbled down the ladder. Lucy, listening from up at the hole in the basement floor, could hear them scrambling along the tunnel with a succession of slaps, punches, curses, and bellows that gradually diminished in volume the

farther they advanced. They sounded like the Three Stooges.

When she could no longer hear them, Lucy also climbed down the ladder. She followed the trio's path along the tunnel. Only partway, however; then she paused to do something she had wanted to do for some time. "Now *that* might be called clumsy," she murmured, when she had finished. "And now, if you'll excuse me, I must run."

Rather hurriedly, Lucy turned around and came back through the tunnel and climbed out, dusting herself off.

There was a rumbling noise down below.

Lucy Haxley climbed into the back of the waiting automobile.

"Everything all right, darling?" asked the man sitting inside.

"Splendid, darling."

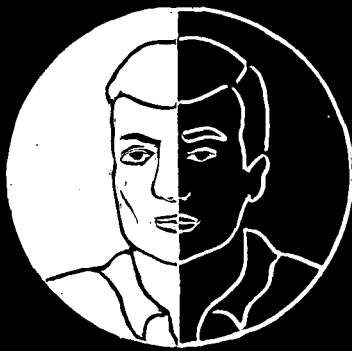
"I thought—perhaps a few weeks getting some really good bird-watching in? How does a Kirtland's warbler and then perhaps a black francolin sound? You need a little travel and sun."

"Oh, darling—a Kirtland's warbler! It sounds perfect. And we both need a trip. You look a bit pale: you've been working too hard. It really was dangerous work, Nickie. Jack was right about being careful around the shorings. Just a touch is enough. Or *was* enough," she added, with one of her smiles.

The chauffeur lowered the screen separating the driver's seat from the passengers. "The airport, Mr. Compton?"

The blue Rolls Royce of Mr. N. (for Nicholas) C. (for Chase) Compton purred smoothly away.

FICTION



Phases of the Moon

by Gary Alexander

My name is Ted Washburn. I graduated from the University of Washington School of Law in June, passed the bar exam on my first try, and have been in private practice for three months. I heard this joke during my second year in law school.

Question: Why are lawyers being used now for medical research instead of rats?

Answer: Because there are more of them and they're less lovable.

That little dig carried a message, and it wasn't just the public perception of shyster hordes asphyxiating themselves (hopefully) on ambulance exhaust fumes. Ethical behavior is an individual responsibility. Those of us who can sleep at night shouldn't feel tarred by that wide brush. At least I don't.

Supply and demand is the point that stung. Example. Seattle is the nation's twenty-fifth largest city. The attorney classification fills *forty-three* Yellow Pages.

No violins, please. I knew the risks. A career change at that stage of my life was chancy enough. Entry into an overcrowded field increased the hazards only slightly.

You see, I am forty-five years old. Once upon a time I was a supervisory aerospace engineer

at Boeing. I had twenty years seniority and was pulling down fifty thou per year. Besides the lost income, law school cost me eighteen grand and a marriage.

Why did I do it? To deal with people instead of numbers. To escape the suffocating inertia of computer printouts and office politics. To solve the problems of my fellow man as opposed to improving the servo efficiency of an airliner's aileron actuating assembly.

If I sound hokey, so be it. That paragraph of pomp came from the gut.

So here I am, at a suburban business park, in a single room described in the lease as a "suite." The chic restaurants Joyce (my ex) and I frequented in my former life had larger restrooms. Everybody on our floor shares a single receptionist/typist, à la Carol on the old Newhart show. Belli, I ain't.

Therefore it wasn't difficult for Alma Ordway to locate me. She just walked in and there I was, trying like the devil to stay busy with my meager caseload of auto accidents and marriage dissolutions. I was learning in a hurry that competing with the McLaw legal chains for the marginal stuff was not easy.

Alma Ordway was a slim, attractive woman of about sixty. Her facial skin was unnatu-

rally smooth and taut, presumably the craftsmanship of a plastic surgeon. She wore an expensive pants suit and was an advocate of eye contact.

When she introduced herself, the Ordway name clicked. For two reasons. Ordway as in Ordway Steel, Alma being the past CEO and present family matriarch. The original Ordway had been a pioneer robber baron. Though not big by Pittsburgh standards, Ordway Steel had been a significant local employer until cheap Asian steel finished them off. They closed their plant last year, putting hundreds out of work.

But nobody wept for Alma and her family. They had other interests and the consensus was that mattresses were stuffed, that coupons were clipped when need be.

She offered a bony yet firm handshake and took a seat before I could invite her to. "I like to get right to the heart of things, Mr. Washburn. Will you defend my nephew?"

The second and more immediate reason the Ordway name registered. Night before last, Clifford Ordway, the nephew, had shot and seriously wounded his wife Marcia. A page one story.

"Why me?"

"You were recommended to me."

"By whom?"

"Dallas Bryant."

I smiled. Dallas was an old and good friend, a senior partner in the firm of Higbee, Bryant and Spencer. His offices were so high in a downtown tower that they sometimes had their own weather. His shop talk had been a major influence on my career move. I'd told Dallas of my decision even before springing it on Joyce, a clue in retrospect that our marriage wasn't exactly hunky-dory before I went—in her words—middle-age crazy.

"I'm not trying to talk myself out of a fee, Mrs. Ordway, but Higbee, Bryant and Spencer has over eighty attorneys."

"Eighty-seven, to be precise. Dallas and his people handle personal and corporate matters for us, Mr. Washburn, but they don't involve themselves in criminal law. Dallas believes that despite your inexperience you are perceptive and quite capable. I personally regard your maturity as a plus.

"Clifford's parents died young. I've always been a substitute mother of sorts. That responsibility, upon occasion, has been a challenge, but I do want him to have an adequate defense. Will you take the case?"

I was wary. I imagined that Higbee, Bryant and Spencer's annual billing to Ordway was

six digits. If Alma had insisted, *somebody* would have been assigned to dirty his hands representing her Clifford.

"I read about it in the papers," I said, evading the question. "Clifford shot Marcia at their home, then called the police. She was unconscious, wounded in the shoulder and leg, but is expected to recover. They say he was disoriented."

"Disoriented is a charitable term," Alma said coldly. "He was babbling about aliens and UFO's and magnetic beams they used to force him to kill her. On and on and on. Clifford's earlier years were spent in dissipation, Mr. Washburn. He was a drinker and a playboy. After his marriage to Marcia five years ago, he made an effort to settle down and conduct himself responsibly. After a life of pampered luxury, for which I accept some blame, it was difficult for him. Clifford is forty years old.

"We appointed him a vice-president of Ordway Steel, a title, really, in the beginning. We increased his duties gradually and he seemed to be adjusting. In the past two years, though, he retrogressed. The pressures of the job, I think, were too much, and the plant shutdown completely unhinged him. There were other incidents of bizarre behavior that occurred

the two year time frame."

"Did he and Marcia have prior marital problems?"

"Predictably, yes. She's ten years younger than Clifford. They met and married in Las Vegas after a two week courtship. He found her in one of those near-naked dancing revues they have in those casinos. That should tell you something. She's a golddigger and a tramp. Everybody but Clifford recognized her instantly for what she was. What trust money Clifford didn't squander, she has. He's living on his salary and a little income from separate holdings."

"The newspaper account was sketchy," I said, backstepping even farther from this soap opera.

"Clifford said he had been working late that night, then went home. Maybe he had, but it would be a first. The detectives smelled liquor on his breath. Anyway, he and Marcia had a spat. Nothing unusual there, except that this particular argument was settled with a pistol rather than words and face slaps.

"Marcia can thank her lucky stars that she isn't dead. Clifford has a house full of guns and he's a crack shot. An ample chunk of his trust was spent on African safaris. Fortunately for her, he was so discombobulated

by his space monsters that his aim was awry. But then Clifford never could do anything right except drink and hunt and play polo and tennis and be the great American sportsman. He fancies himself the eternal athlete."

"The incidents of bizarre behavior you mentioned?"

Alma Ordway ticked them off on skeletal, bejeweled fingers. "A barroom brawl. No, two barroom brawls. The night the police found him wandering naked in front of his house was especially embarrassing. Another time he stopped traffic on a highway. He was warning motorists about a black hole."

"Has he had psychiatric treatment?"

"Lord, yes," Alma said, rolling her eyes. "The loony periods are brief and sporadic. He's usually lucid, and the best analysts in town have been unable to make contact with his demons. Again, Mr. Washburn, will you take the case?"

As she spoke, she was writing a retainer check larger than last quarter's tuition. "I will. Where is Clifford? I'll need to see him."

"He's still, pardon the vernacular, in the hoosegow," she said, tearing off the check.

"How's he doing?"

"I wouldn't have the faintest."

"You haven't visited him?" I

asked, hoping my astonishment was subdued.

"And make a crime reporter's day? No, thank you."

"Do you intend to post bond?"

"In a few days," she said evenly. "When he's completely cooled down. The man is dangerous."

I was going to phone Dallas Bryant when our person-Friday came in with a message from him. I returned his call, which was an invitation to lunch. We met at a private club on the top floor of his building.

The waiters wore starched uniforms and bow ties. They knew their members by name and cocktail preference. Clout was a redundant term in this aerie, but Dallas had some extra. We were seated at a table with a spectacular skyline view. You could easily picture yourself in a helicopter, taking the grand tour.

Dallas and I went way back, to undergrad studies at the University of Washington—him pre-law, me aeronautical engineering—and varsity football. He was a lineman, I an end and back. No offensive or defensive. You played both ways then.

The steroided behemoths of today's big-time college ball could eat us in three gulps. Dallas played at one ninety, one ninety-five. I went fifteen

pounds lighter. Thanks to regular exercise and lucky genes, we'd both managed to stay close to our playing weights.

Dallas was pinstriped elegance. Me, well, I was a bit out of my element in slacks and cardigan sweater, a statement more of comfort (so I told myself) than post-adolescent defiance of the attorneys' stodgy dress code. The crewcut? I've had it forever, honestly, even before short hair returned to fashion.

We enjoyed leisurely vodka martinis and chitchat. The subject, of course, was the Ordways. Their eroded empire, dowager Alma, black sheep Clifford.

"I appreciate the referral, Dallas, but I have the impression Alma knows she could do better and doesn't care. She wants an *adequate* defense. If my nephew was in this kind of a jam, I'd want a helluva lot more than adequate."

"Don't sell yourself short, buddy."

"I'm not, but I'm a rookie," I said. "I've never defended a felony before. Who am I, Perry Mason?"

"We don't do windows or criminal law. It's unseemly, you know," Dallas said, laughing, poking fun at himself.

"Some of your eighty-seven troops must be qualified."

Dallas studied the menu and

shrugged. "We've got several who came over to us following apprenticeships as deputy prosecutors."

"You told Alma?"

"Yeah. She wasn't enthusiastic. She said they were probably rusty. She said she wasn't opposed to a fresh, eager approach. Experience not necessary. A case a hungry newcomer could build his career around."

"Did you buy it?"

"Not really. I explained the special intricacies of trial law to her, but she'd already made up her mind. Believe me, Ted, a session with Alma is a swim upstream."

"She wants her nephew crucified?"

"No, I don't think so. She does want a quick and simple and quiet resolution. Clifford is an adult who should pay the consequences, but not on the cover of a tabloid. I told her you were a tenacious guy. She said fine, she couldn't ask for more."

"She's figuring an insanity plea?"

"Maybe, but I kind of doubt if it would fly," Dallas said after a moment's hesitation. "The trial would drag out and stay in the media. My hunch is bargaining first-degree assault down to second."

"Sweep Clifford under a priceless Persian rug," I said.

"Don't be too cynical, Ted. There is something else, an off-the-wall possibility. I discussed the situation with one of our prosecutors. One of his last cases was a domestic violence. Mitigating circumstances were introduced."

I waited for the punch line. Dallas looked up from his menu and turned his head toward the center of the room. A waiter arrived instantly. Dallas ordered the veal Marsala. Sounded okay to me, too. "Well?"

"Michael—that's the deputy prosecutor—Michael said that Clifford attacked Marcia on the night of a full moon."

My initial reply was a stare. I finally said, "Last year or maybe the year before, I attended a lecture on the effects of a full moon. It was interesting, but I think we're reaching."

"Seriously, Ted, statistics bear out a factor. Nothing's chiseled in stone, but the attorney defending Michael's guy presented a pile of half-baked research. His client was a repeat druggie with burglary priors, too. He was convicted and did time, but the judge gave him a couple of years less than average. He was a little more berserk than he normally was under the influence."

"Was he under the influence of anything?"

"Aside from a few beers, he tested clean. Don't bother checking out the transcript, Ted. These things are adjudicated with raised eyebrows and nods. According to Michael, the phenomenon may or may not exist, but if all else fails this might give you some leverage."

Dallas turned to the dessert menu. "I like to plan ahead. The kiwifruit cheesecake looks interesting. What do you think?"

"Interesting is the key word today," I said. "Definitely interesting."

Ted Washburn, ace criminal defense barrister, paid his first visit to the county jail. I couldn't get over the noise. Behind the interview area, the us-and-them demarcation, was a din of shouting. Only the obscenities were intelligible. You could sense the boredom and the fury.

Clifford Ordway was brought to me and we were left alone. He was a lean and graying man who looked his forty years, though no older. Even in baggy jail fatigues, he had a bearing. I'd expected a bloated hulk of a playboy with rheumy eyes, but Ordway was athletic, tanned, and steady.

"Aunt Alma sent a note that you were coming, Mr. Washburn."

"It's Ted," I said. "She ad-

vised me that she'll be arranging bail."

Ordway smiled. "Cliff. I know. In due time. When I was a pup, if I was naughty she postponed my allowance."

"Can you tell me what happened?"

Cliff Ordway shook his head. "I can't tell you any more than I've already told the police. I was at the office working late. I'm not much of a boozier these days, but I kind of remember stopping off somewhere for a drink. Next thing I know, I'm standing over Marcia with a gun."

"You have a recent history of, uh—"

"Weirdness," Ordway finished, looking at me in total calm. "That's on the record. Seattle's leading shrinks can't explain it and neither can I. Their opinion is an inherent instability coaxed to the surface by job stress. I didn't buckle down until Marcia and I were married. I'm no high-powered executive, Ted. I've been indulged my entire life. I've tried to march in step with family expectations, but I guess I just couldn't hack it. The plant closing affected me deeply. All those working people dumped on the street and me helpless to prevent it. I suppose that was the catalyst."

"You were working late at the office. With the steel mill

shut down, what do you do?"

"We have non-steel holdings. Real estate, stock in other manufacturing concerns, and various dibs and dabs. It keeps me busy."

"The incidents began about two years ago, didn't they, before Ordway Steel went under?"

"Yes."

"Do you remember the dates?"

He did. Exact dates. I jotted them down and asked, "How had you and Marcia been getting along?"

His eyes glassed over and locked on mine. In the harsh, fluorescent lighting, I could see my reflection in them. "We loved each other very much, Ted. We had our rough spots, but—this! Thank God my aim was bad. She deserves to hate me."

"You don't recall blaming the attack on UFO's and aliens?"

Cliff Ordway buried his face in his hands and trembled. When he recovered, he said, "Every whacko stunt I've pulled, they've said I raved about outer space and ray beams and the like, but I swear it's a blank."

"Is there anything in the blackout interim between the drinks and the gun in your hand that comes to you? Anything?"

He hesitated and stared at his fingernails. "I'm not sure. Maybe I dreamt it later."

"What?"

"Not a recollection as such. A—a sensation. A black void, then for an instant a light. A warm yellow light, like I was being bathed in it. My body felt warm and moist. Crazy, huh?"

I said not necessarily and that I would stay in close touch. I went to the nearest library and consulted almanacs for this year and last, the astronomy and daily calendar sections. Ordway had provided six dates and each coincided with a full moon.

An axiom of physics teachers: nature abhors a vacuum. An axiom of Ted Washburn: nature is none too fond of coincidences, either. With that thought uppermost, I remained cautiously excited by my revelation. If I was to expose myself to courtroom ridicule by employing a flaky defense, I'd best stockpile all available ammunition.

To that end, I drove to the university and Larry Reed, assistant professor of astronomy. He hopped out of a chair in his cubbyhole office and shook my hand vigorously.

"Incredible," he said. "I thought I was totally forgotten."

I introduced myself and explained what I needed. "You were on the front page of the

campus paper. Your theory drew me to your lecture."

Reed wore carefully wrinkled pastels, had a day's growth of beard. He was cultivating the *Miami Vice* look, but he was pudgy and swarthy. He looked more like Yassir Arafat than Don Johnson.

"Another eon," he said. "I said my piece and that's that. Sensationalism doesn't win you brownie points in academia."

"Are you saying you've been discredited?"

"Nope. It's a matter of indifference and embarrassment. I did my homework and I disseminated fact, not hypothesis. We're talking about style. You're not supposed to have style, be controversial, come off the wall. Several people have asked me if I wouldn't rather apply to the *Supermarket Whatever* for a fellowship than stick around to build tenure. Was I into astrogeology or snake medicine? I got the message. My specialty is moons of the solar system. Ours, when you think about it, isn't very sexy compared to Titan and its smog or the volcanoes lighting up Io. Its primary charm derives from legend. Look at my digs, Washburn. I'm the department nutso. They keep me stashed here where I can't do too much harm. I teach survey classes to freshmen who're cop-

ping an easy science credit."

"Your belief in lunar madness isn't nutty, is it?"

"Luna is the Latin for moon. Luna as in lunatic, or literally *lunaticus*, Latin for moonstruck. Our humble orb of green cheese has its powers."

"Supposition?"

"Hard fact," Reed said. "I did my homework. In the full phase there is a jump in abnormal behavior. Police reports increase accordingly."

"Why?"

"Between folklore and modern statistical patterns, attention began to be paid to mental patients, who were observed to be especially agitated during a full moon. Skeptics chalked it up to amplified nocturnal light and restlessness caused by sleep interruption. We now know otherwise."

"Why, you ask? It's anyone's guess, but my favorite is gravitational influence. Nobody denies that the moon controls tidal motion. The ratio of the tide-raising force of the moon to that of the sun is eleven to five. So why couldn't the human psyche also be subjected to a tug?"

"Your statistical evidence is solid?" I asked.

"We don't have to bolt our doors and you ain't gonna grow extra hair, but, yeah, arson takes a marked leap. Family

fisticuffs and assorted spontaneous aggression spike on the graphs, too."

"Would you be willing to testify as an expert witness?"

"For a fee, sure. Us assistant prof types, the IRS doesn't know we're alive."

"Have you testified before?"

"Three times. You lawyers, notably prosecutors, you don't like to raise a big fuss about it. It's sort of, you know, a concept too medieval to be comfortable with."

"How did those trials end?"

"The defendants were in pickles similar to your client's. They went zero for three, but on reduced charges and sentences."

"No insanity pleas?"

Larry Reed chuckled. "I like to dig clams. Those terrific low tides aren't the result of goofiness."

My next stop was the King County Courthouse and the deputy prosecutor assigned to Clifford Ordway. His name was Richard Page. He was in his twenties, had longish hair and freckles. Razor blade purchases were not yet breaking his household budget.

"Where do I know you from?" he said, squinting at me.

He was familiar to me, too. I think he was a third year law student when I was in my first.

"I don't know," I hedged.

He continued studying me. "Washburn. Maybe it's your name that rings a bell."

I shrugged and shifted to business, outlining my interviews with Ordway and Larry Reed.

"You're going the insanity route, sir?"

Sir? "No, but my client clearly wasn't himself when he shot his wife. This is a man who used to bag elephants and lions with a single shot. If it were a premeditated attempt to kill her, he would have succeeded."

"Safaris," Page said, his face wrinkled in disgust. "Killing innocent animals. That grosses me out."

"Nonetheless, I don't believe first degree assault is warranted."

"I'll have to check with my boss," Page said. "He'll probably agree to a guilty plea on assault-two, but Ordway will have to do some time. The Ordway name automatically makes the case a carnival and this is election year. You roll in your space cadet expert and we'll all be stars on the five o'clock news."

Ninety days, I thought. With credit for time already served. Two to five years probation, a psychiatric treatment proviso tacked on. This was easy, too easy. I said, "I'll run it by my client. And my space cadet, by

the way, is a legitimate authority."

"No offense meant, sir," Page said quickly. "It's just that I've been taught to deal with substance. Fact, fact, fact. I'm sure it was the same when you were in law school, Mr. Washburn."

It dawned on me. Young Mr. Page was taking my lined face at literal face value. Young Mr. Page with two more years of lawyering under his belt than I. I was a Gray Fox, a legal eagle who had been around, a trial attorney who knew every trick. Who said life didn't begin at forty?

When I was at the door, Page snapped his fingers. "I've got it!"

"Got what?"

"Where I know you from. My dad's mentioned your name. He was going to the U when you played football there. You're *that* Ted Washburn, aren't you?"

A heightened hero-worship tone in Page's voice was setting my cheeks on fire. I never understood celebrities and their craving for adulation. "Could be."

"Dad and I are football nuts. We have season tickets for the Huskies and the Seahawks. The only Rose Bowl game he's ever gone to was '64. He talks about it a lot. You lost, but I can't remember the score."

"Illinois 17, us 7."

"Wasn't it you who was carried off with a broken nose?"

I had cut inside on a pass pattern. The Illini middle linebacker objected to my encroachment into his territory. I caught the ball. Next thing I knew it was the fourth quarter. The hit was clean, though akin to a collision with a locomotive. The linebacker's name was Dick Butkus.

Mr. Page's father had a sadistic memory. I touched my flattened proboscis. "Guilty as charged."

Scheduling of the trial was delayed until Marcia Ordway was released from the hospital. That happened two weeks later, and a court date was set for early next month. Sensationalism has its dubious advantages; *Clifford Ordway v. County of King* bucked a long, long line of car prowls and petty drug infractions.

Alma, meanwhile, had bailed Cliff out. He was living alone in his home on Mercer Island, an affluent enclave surrounded by Lake Washington. He was very alone. Marcia Ordway had taken a downtown apartment, and Cliff was being pretty much shunned by Alma and the clan. I advised Cliff not to object to the restraining order obtained by Marcia, and he didn't.

He was equally cooperative when I recommended furtherance of psychiatric treatment. Cliff's doctor, a new one, diagnosed him as a borderline paranoid schizophrenic lacking consistent enough tendencies to stand an insanity plea. Which we wouldn't employ anyhow, since Page's boss had agreed to assault-two. The media circus was canceled. A few moments before the judge, crossing t's and dotting i's, and it would be history. Ninety days incarceration minus pre-trial confinement already served. Easy.

The psychiatrist pooh-poohed the moon madness business. He wavered mightily, unwilling, I knew, to joust the theory with colleagues hired by the other side. The worst case scenario (his lingo) was a brain tumor. In event of unexpected developments or a prosecutor double-cross requiring me to play Clarence Darrow, I discussed his recommendation of a neurological exam to Cliff.

No problem. They did a complete workup, including a brain scan. Negative. There was nothing inside Clifford Ordway's skull except the gray matter he'd been born with.

Cliff was a bright, likable guy and I felt for him. We became friends. He belonged to an exclusive health club, a new multimillion dollar affair that

catered to post-yuppies who could afford the dues. Located in a pricy suburb, it sported acres of tennis courts and everything else associated with trendy fitness.

We mostly played basketball, one on one. I lettered in high school and Cliff had played frosh ball at Stanford before flunking out. He still owned a killer hook shot and won four games out of five. We'd eat afterward, have a couple of brews. His alcohol consumption was moderate. Everything about him seemed moderate, normal, level.

The next full moon came and went without incident. I know. We were together having dinner at Cliff's club on a gloriously balmy autumn evening, on the dining room deck. Larry Reed's Luna was so bright the greenbelt below and beyond cast faint shadows.

Club management had set up a small telescope and tripod for celestial gazers. Cliff had regarded my moon madness defense with qualms and mild amusement, though he did appreciate the practical effect—weeks in jail as opposed to months or years.

To my surprise, he hogged the scope, fascinated by its clarity. Go look, he coaxed. You can actually see the craters. I did. Sure enough, you could. What do you think, I asked? Wish it

was more powerful, he replied. Then maybe we could see the Apollo landers. Fantastic night, huh?

Moderate, normal, level. Boy, was I wrong! For a reason I hadn't even considered.

The trial was delayed three weeks. Marcia Ordway was recovering nicely, but bothered by pain. I agreed to a continuance. In return, Richard Page gave me permission to visit Marcia. Our plea bargaining arrangement held, so my motivation was curiosity and an obsession for leaving nothing undone. Putting a Boy Scout knot on a loose end already tied.

Marcia's downtown apartment was an unsold luxury condominium. Developers had misjudged the quantity of buyers willing to pay a quarter-million and up for an Elliott Bay view and a mere elevator ride to the Public Market, theaters, and shopping. Contractors were renting the units monthly to fend off Chapter Eleven.

Marcia's was on the ninth floor, two blocks from the waterfront. Her doorbell chimes treated me to a nasal rendition of *My Way*. She answered leaning on a cane, displayed perfect teeth, and led me inside, listing just slightly on her injured side.

The cane was white, the color

of the belt cinching her pink jumpsuit. It was easy to picture her as a Vegas showgirl. She had a figure and face suited to ornamentation. There was a brittleness to her, though. Her makeup was a bit overdone and her blonde hair fell into the platinum range. Whether the hardness was natural Marcia Ordway or a result of her recent trauma or a combination of each I couldn't guess.

Marcia's living room furnishings were plastic and glossy, hot primary colors relentlessly coordinated. A tiger on black velvet painting over the fireplace tied it all together.

She asked me to sit beside her on a vinyl sofa. She lit a cigarette and said, "Mr. Page says you're representing Clifford. I was hoping to see you anyway."

"You were?"

"Before we get into that, what do you want to know?"

I asked for her version of the shooting.

"He came home that evening with a wild look on his face. I'd seen that look before, and it scared the bejesus out of me. He'd been drinking, too. We got into a beef over something. I don't even remember what. Lately we'd fight at the drop of a hat. He stomped out of the room, went into his den, and came back with a pistol. He was shouting at somebody on the

other side of the room who wasn't there and started firing at me. I woke up in the emergency room."

"Who was he shouting at?"

Marcia drew smoke to the floor of her chest and exhaled. "The emperor of Venus."

I heard a thumping noise in another room. I asked, "You and Cliff hadn't been getting along?"

"That's putting it mildly. I was in this cancan act when we met. We warmed up Wayne Newton. It was a whirlwind all the way. Things've been downhill ever since."

"Love at first sight?"

She looked at me with icy blue eyes. "For Clifford, yeah. For me, security at first sight. Vegas isn't the easiest life in the world and I knew I wasn't going anywhere, Hollywood or anything like that. I tried, I really tried, but we never did have anything going. The electricity between us, you couldn't run a transistor radio with it. I know what you're thinking, Mr. Washburn, the same thing Alma, the queen bitch, and the rest think, but I was honest with Clifford from Day One. He knew where we stood and he didn't care. I never b.s.ed him that he'd swept me off my feet or anything."

"When did it really sour?"

"About two years ago. It

wasn't bad till then. We weren't planning to have kids or anything, but we were making it. Then Clifford started having his attacks."

A bedroom door opened. A young man wearing only gym trunks came out. He was high-stepping, bouncing a soccer ball from knee to knee.

"Mr. Washburn, this is Dieter. He's a friend of mine. I met him in Toronto last year. He's in town trying out for the indoor soccer team. He's been helping me with the lifting and the heavy work I can't do yet."

I nodded. Dieter smiled and grunted, controlling the ball as if it were on a string. He was probably voting age, but I wouldn't swear to it. With his physique and wild mane of hair, he looked like Prince Valiant. I wondered cattily how much customs duty Marcia had paid on him.

She lit a cigarette from the one she was smoking and said, "Dieter, that's nifty, but don't practice out here, okay? I'm getting a headache."

Dieter smiled, grunted, and casually retreated into the bedroom, the magical ball in tow. I asked, "Had you and Cliff considered divorce?"

"God, yes," Marcia said. "I had. Clifford wouldn't hear of it."

"How long ago?"

"The first time, maybe a week before he stopped traffic on account of a black hole, whatever that is."

"The first time?"

"I felt sorry for him. I let it slide. We'd get in a fight, I'd ask again. Eight, nine months ago, I had my lawyer draw up papers."

"Did you file?"

"No, he'd do one of his whacko numbers and I'd get scared and drop it."

"The incidents coincided with your demands for a divorce?"

"Not to the day, but real soon afterwards. That's what I wanted to talk to you about, Mr. Washburn. I guess I asked for too much in the settlement. You know Clifford hasn't been doing too good lately. The mill shut down, and most of his trust is gone. Right now I'll settle for my freedom and a lump sum that won't bust him. Do you think you could talk some sense into him? I'd drop the charges if they'd let me. I just wanna be rid of the creep."

"I'd advise waiting."

"I know, until the hearing or trial or whatever it is. But it's cut and dried, isn't it? Mr. Page said so."

"True. I'll present our conversation to Cliff when I next see him," I said.

With the help of the cane, Marcia rose to her feet. She was

done with business and anxious to be done with me. Maybe she had an urgent chore for the energetic Dieter. We walked to the door.

"Anything he asks for, Mr. Washburn, he can have. It's worth every damn penny to have him out of my life forever," she said.

I believed her. Marcia Ordway was terrified.

Almanacs are handy. They compress the aggregate of significant human knowledge into a volume two inches thick. They permit lazy laymen such as myself to become whizbang researchers during a lunch hour. The almanac that informed me that Cliff's incidents (the word's eroding into a euphemism) occurred at full moons also informed me that the moon cycles every twenty-nine days and that the gaudy globe enjoyed at Cliff's club was a Harvest Moon. The following full moon is known as a Hunter's Moon. It's a dazzler, too, although less flashy than its immediate predecessor.

The above knowledge was obtained from a copy I purchased at a supermarket paperback rack. The five-ninety-five plus sales tax was tallied into Alma Ordway's tab.

I'd visited Marcia Ordway three days prior to the Hunter's

Moon. Cliff and I had a basketball and dinner date that evening. I fabricated an excuse and canceled. There were thoughts to be collected. It was Tuesday and I suggested Friday. Okay by him.

Friday afternoon he phoned and said he'd sprained his wrist playing squash. Aunt Alma's eternal athlete, I thought. How about just dinner at my place instead, he suggested. I agreed.

I'd never been to Cliff's Mercer Island home. Reality matched preconception. An original design of stained cedar and glass, it had multiple levels, a hillside overlook onto the lake, and nary a right angle. Similar styles featured in the Sunday supplements were termed Northwest Contemporary. I preferred Twenty-first Century Gothic.

The living room was the size of a Roman amphitheater and spotless. Cliff said that it was the housekeeper's day off and apologized for the mess. She had, however, prepared tonight's dinner yesterday. Cliff took from the freezer plates of chicken Cordon Bleu, wild rice, and asparagus spears, and zapped them into the microwave. TV dinners of the rich and famous.

While it was mid-October, daytime temperatures all week had been in the sixties, an In-

dian summer by any definition. Nighttimes were frosty, the sky starlit. We ate on one of who knows how many decks, wearing sweaters. That Hunter's Moon rested near the horizon, reflecting on the lake, beaming in. Astronomy did not enter our conversation.

We polished off a dessert of butterscotch mousse, and Cliff offered a tour. We walked it with sniffers of brandy bottled before either of us was born. His den was something to behold, a hypermacho anachronism of weaponry and death. On pine-paneled walls, in racks and cabinets, was enough firepower to outfit an infantry platoon. Heads of every animal species I'd ever seen on *Wild Kingdom* were mounted on plaques.

"What do you think, Ted?" he asked proudly.

"Uh-huh," was my only response. I did not say what I was thinking, that the hides of tigers, lions, and bears used as throw rugs were particularly obscene. Those thoughts I was collecting? They would antagonize him sufficiently without a sermon on the slaughter of endangered wildlife.

"I haven't hunted in years," Cliff said. "Besides the cost factor, safaris aren't too fashionable these days, are they?"

"People still do them," I said. "With cameras."

Cliff laughed. "That'd be like kissing your sister."

No time like the proverbial present. I began. "Ever hear of Larry Reed, Cliff?"

"No. Should I have?"

"He teaches astronomy at the U. Two years ago, he gave a lecture on the effects of a full moon. The auditorium was packed. You and I could have been sitting side by side."

"We weren't. I wasn't there."

"You probably weren't, but I have a special fascination for coincidences. Your full moon episodes started around then."

His expression was blank. His words could have been in cadence to a metronome. "Are we leading up to something here, Ted?"

I tapped my forehead. "We are, Cliff. We are. Whether Reed's lecture was your inspiration or not, a light bulb flicked on two years ago and you ran with it."

"The full moon theory is yours, Ted, not mine."

"After you planted the seed. You went bananas on the full moon. Six times. Not a day before, not a day later. And you recited the exact dates when we met at the jail. You've got great recall, Cliff."

"You're not sounding like my attorney, Ted."

"Why am I, I wonder? Aunt Alma picked me because I was

adequate. She had her motives. I'm *adequate* to blunder you through on a reduced charge. A high-octane trial lawyer would keep the mess in the headlines and possibly win. With me, you wouldn't spend five years behind bars, but you'd be out of her hair for a while, too. You went along with the choice because you knew I'd swallow the moon madness bait and give the prosecution an easy out. If you served any time, the media would be off their backs. Our assault-two deal, a couple of months in the county slammer, the days will breeze by. Clifford Ordway is not destined to be a Birdman of Alcatraz. Everybody's happy."

Cliff said nothing.

"Why didn't you tell me that Marcia had been pushing for a divorce?"

"It didn't seem important. I thought I could dissuade her."

"No, you didn't," I said. "This is a community property state. In a dissolution, assets are split fifty-fifty. You're not as rich as you once were, Cliff, but fifty percent is a good wallop."

"I'd manage."

"Sure, I know, but at a reduced standard of living. You'd lose this place, I guarantee. How many Dieters have there been, Cliff?"

The question didn't logically follow. He was visibly sur-

prised. "How many what?"

"Come on, Cliff."

He averted his eyes. "A few."

"A crazy man bathed in yellow light and communicating with the emperor of Venus, that would scare anyone witless. You'd resigned yourself to a divorce, but damned if you'd make it easy for her. Her settlement demands must have dropped to much less than fifty-fifty as these two years passed. Did you know that she'll sign the papers now just to be free of you? She'd accept any unreasonable offer."

Cliff squinted, as if dredging his memory. "I ran into her attorney at the club this week. He may have mentioned that."

"Congratulations," I said. "You've cut her off at the pock-ets and hurt her physically, too. Who could ask for anything more?"

"That Hunter's Moon outside, it's a beaut. It'd drive a superstitious medieval peasant batty. How are you feeling, Cliff?"

"Irritable," he said, staring at me hard. "It's apparent where we stand as friends. How does this leave our attorney-client relationship?"

"If you choose to continue it, modified. If you agree to drop the plea, I'll defend your first degree assault trial. Despite my misgivings, I owe you the best defense I can muster. If you

choose to discharge me, I'm sure you'll be able to find another attorney who'll hand-carry you through the plea."

Cliff smirked. "I'm sure I can. There are enough of you."

"Forty-three Yellow Pages' worth. Well?"

"You're fired."

"Fine," I said at the den door. "Satisfy my curiosity, will you? In strict confidence. How close to the mark was I?"

I saw in his dark gaze what the animals in this room might have seen a moment before Cliff locked them in the crosshairs of his rifle scope: a foul blend of rage and bloodlust. He did not immediately reply.

When I turned, he said, a little boy's pout on his face, "Shyster."

"Have a nice evening," I said.

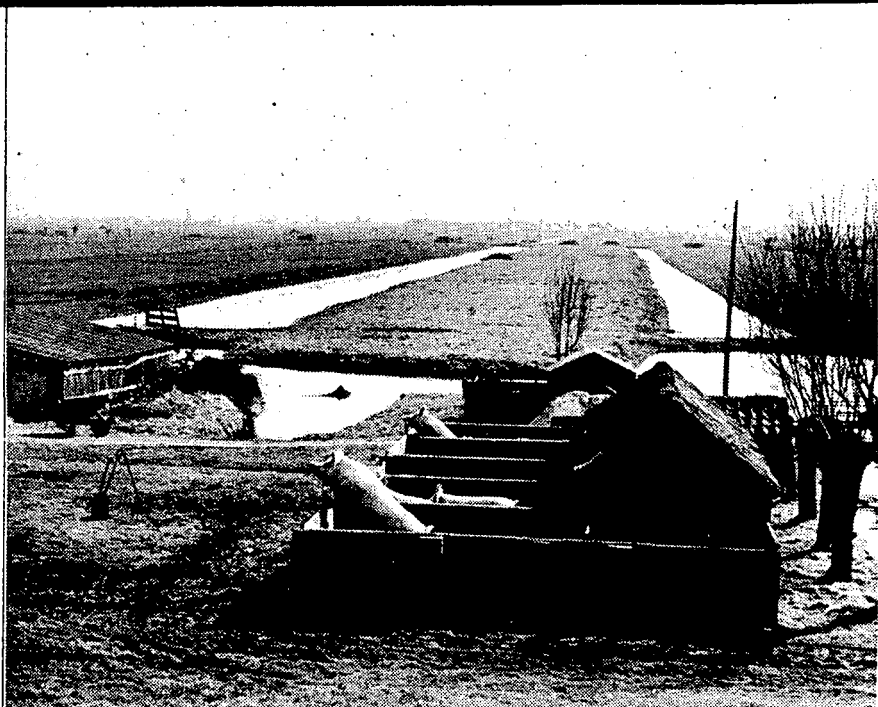
I headed for home. Neon beer

signs in a tavern's windows waylaid me. I had a bottle of Rainier, then a second. I attempted to analyze the ethics of what I had done. I couldn't, not with any clarity. Clifford Ordway *et al.* was one huge gray area, and I was up to my elbows in that nebulous substance. I made a mental note to invite Dallas Bryant to lunch tomorrow, to kick it around with him. Lunch on me. At Burger King.

I ordered a third beer and carried it to a hallway pay phone. I had a sudden urge to call Joyce, my ex. Just to talk. She's not a bad person. We scrimped when we were newly married and she couldn't cope with a re-run in middle-age.

I dialed her number. Maybe she'd ask me over. Crazy. Must be the full moon.

THE MYSTERIOUS PHOTOGRAPH



© Henri Cartier-Bresson/Magnum

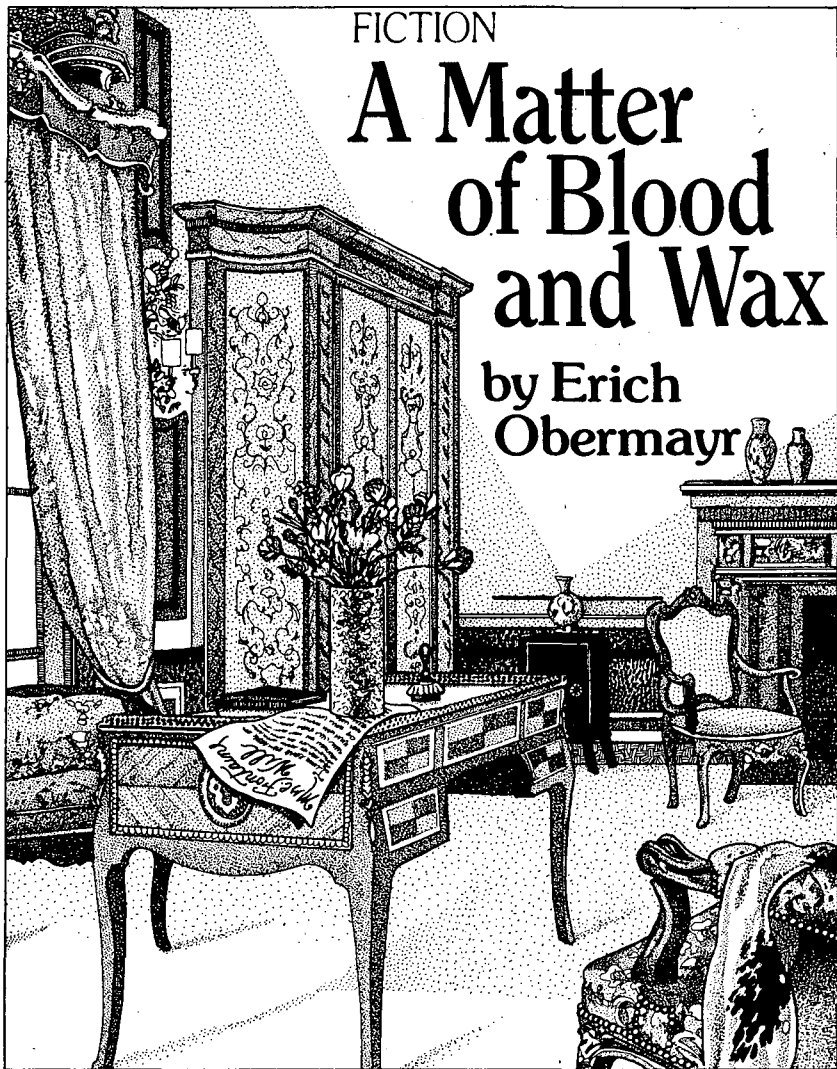
Ready for wolves. And waiting. We will give a prize of \$25 to the person who invents the best mystery story (in 250 words or less—and be sure to include a crime, please), based on the above photograph. The story will be printed in a future issue. Reply to Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, New York 10017.

The winning entry for the October Mysterious Photograph will be found on page 155.

FICTION

A Matter of Blood and Wax

by Erich Obermayer



The summer of 1888 will always be remembered for the extraordinary oppressiveness of its heat and humidity, especially among those many Parisians who escaped to the Côte d'Azur for the month

of August and could, therefore, only imagine what the less fortunate inhabitants left behind must have endured. Inspector Paul Aichele, lately retired from the Paris police, was one of those lacking the means to flee

to the Mediterranean beaches. He would have been the last to describe himself as unfortunate, however. His days were spent behind the thick, cool walls of his Rue St. Severin apartment, perusing the *Gazette de France* each morning and passing the afternoons in his modest library among the volumes he had collected, but never had time to read, over the course of his twenty-five year career.

Aichele was absorbed in Zola's *L'Assomoir* one such August afternoon when the sound of an approaching carriage broke the silence of the deserted street, coming to a stop just beneath the window of his study. The sharp clicks of a woman's footsteps progressed from the curb across the walk and up the steps to his door. There was an impatient rapping, and he heard Mrs. Poll, the Englishwoman who came twice a week to help with the housework, put down whatever it was she was doing and answer it, her exasperation somehow penetrating the several walls between them.

After a brief, muted exchange Mrs. Poll's strident but padded footsteps came toward the study, accompanied by the sharper steps of the visitor. Aichele pushed aside the small curtain at the window and saw in the street a very expensive

coupé, two jet-black horses in harness, their bobbed tails twitching fitfully at the summer flies.

"This is Mme. de Crécy to see you, inspector," Mrs. Poll announced, half-heartedly adopting the role of butler for the moment before she disappeared down the hallway.

Mme. de Crécy was quite beautiful. Her clothes were immaculate and very stylish, and her dark eyes and full lips were perfectly arrayed on the delicate oval of her face. There was a serenity about her which the heat of the day had barely ruffled. Only the slightest narrowing of her eyes betrayed her preoccupation with some unsettling worry.

"A pleasure," Aichele said as he extended his hand, which she took briefly. He offered one of the study's plain wooden chairs and she seated herself to the side of the writing table near the window. "I'll be with you in a moment," he said, and leaned into the hallway and called out toward the kitchen. "Mrs. Poll, could you be so good as to bring us some of your lemonade; it's really quite good and would be just the thing for our guest."

"Now, Mme. de Crécy, to what do I owe the honor of this visit?"

"I've come to ask your help, inspector. You see, a terrible

injustice has been done."

"An injustice?" Aichele was tempted to add an ironic or disbelieving comment, but he was not an unkind man and he held his peace. "What sort of injustice?"

"They have arrested M. Swann," Mme. de Crécy said, with such forthrightness it was clear that, to her, the simple fact of the matter was cause for outrage.

The door opened, pushed by Mrs. Poll, who entered the room backwards, protecting a large tray upon which were two glasses filled with irregular chunks of ice and a large pitcher of lemonade.

"Thank you, Mrs. Poll," Aichele said. "Sugar?" he asked, offering Mme. de Crécy the sugar bowl from the desk. She refused, as if taking the lemonade had already wasted too much time. Aichele dissolved a small spoonful in his glass and stood stirring it, the ice clinking as it swirled around.

"Now, you say a M. Swann has been arrested?"

"Yes, for the murder of Mme. Fontaine."

"Oh?" Aichele remembered an article, within the last week, about the case. The widow of George Fontaine, a wealthy and well known entrepreneur, had been murdered and the police had taken a suspect into cus-

tody, someone unknown to Aichele but, according to the *Gazette*, a prominent figure in certain social circles. The *Gazette* had also hinted at a love affair between the two and noted, gratuitously, that Mme. Fontaine was some years older than M. Swann.

"I do recall reading about the case, and I suppose I do sympathize with your friend M. Swann, and yourself, but I also know the Paris police do not simply snatch people at random from the streets and accuse them of crimes. I'm sure they have good reason to hold M. Swann. And as for myself, I'm no longer a member of the force and do not see how I can affect matters one way or another."

"But it is inconceivable for M. Swann to have done what they accuse him of." She spoke with an imposed sternness that strained her composure, and added, after a breath, "You are his only hope."

Aichele was not yet sure of her point. "I have had the professional satisfaction of bringing at least a score of murderers to justice, madame. Without exception, what each one of them did to a fellow human being was in some sense inconceivable. Nevertheless, it was done."

"You do not know M. Swann as I do," she said. "And I am

well aware of the ways of the world, but I am not here to argue philosophy. You referred to your record. Twenty-three is the total of murderers you brought to trial. Eighteen went to the guillotine, the other five languish as we speak on Devil's Island. While the circumstances surrounding your retirement were anything but ordinary, you are still considered to be unexcelled as a detective. That is why I am here. Who better to prove M. Swann innocent than one so skilled at convicting the guilty?"

"I am flattered, madame, but . . ."

"Nor did I come to flatter you. This is a check for twenty thousand francs. It is yours if you agree to undertake an independent investigation of the case against M. Swann. Another check for an equal amount has been deposited at Rothschild Frères, to be transferred to you upon the exoneration of M. Swann."

She placed the check on the writing table. Aichele set down his lemonade and took the check in his hand, glancing at the figures, then put it back on the table. He stepped to the window and once again pushed aside the curtain. The coupé parked at his door was still the only vehicle on the narrow, stony street. The polished mahogany

on its doors and sides glared in the hot sun. Rue St. Severin had not seen that fine a coach in years, nor would it likely see another in many years to come. The horses shook their heads spasmodically, rattling their bridles, and their skin shivered against the flies. A coachman sat waiting, sleepily, though he could brush the insects away with his hand.

Aichele smiled at the irony of it. He had spent his whole life pursuing criminals, and now he was being asked to set one free. And the sum he had been offered to do so, which dwarfed his minuscule savings and token pension, was equal to almost eight years of his old salary. It was enough not only to prove the innocence of an innocent man, but the innocence of a guilty one. Mme. de Crécy did, indeed, know the ways of the world.

"I suppose we are fortunate," Aichele said, thinking out loud, "that your friend is accused of murder, because that is the one crime we can most easily confront with absolute realism. The utterly irreversible nature of the offense—someone alive is suddenly dead—seems to infuse every aspect of a murder case with its own inimitable finality, which means the facts are there, always, and as real as if they were written in stone. So

let us see if it is possible for a poor old man like myself to read these facts correctly, even as you dangle an unimaginable reward before his eyes. I will accept your offer, but let's make the test an exacting one. In the morning I will pay a visit to the Préfecture de Police. I did not leave there under the best of circumstances, as you apparently know, but I will do what I can to evaluate the evidence against M. Swann. If, in my opinion, he has been wrongfully accused, I will notify you accordingly, and you are then to add this check to the Rothschild Frères account. When and if M. Swann is exonerated, the whole account is to be turned over to me. Does that sound fair enough?"

"It seems perfectly fair," she said. "I cannot tell you how much this means. But there is one thing further I must ask. Please tell M. Swann nothing of my visit or our arrangement."

"Of course."

"Once you meet him, you will understand my feelings."

"I will meet with M. Swann if that should prove necessary."

"Here is my card. I will expect to hear from you."

When Aichele unfolded his *Gazette* the next morning, it was with no small amount of

interest that he discovered a front page article about the Fontaine murder. The focus was on Inspector Leroux, the police officer who had solved the crime and who also had been instrumental in the chain of events that had led to Aichele's retirement. This was not lost on him as he read, but he reminded himself there was more important business at hand than rehashing department politics. Leroux was a competent if overly ambitious investigator whose conclusions would not simply evaporate once they came under scrutiny. The article did note, conveniently enough, that Leroux would leave that morning for his vacation in Monaco.

The walk from Aichele's apartment to the Préfecture de Police, a few blocks down the Boulevard-St.-Michel and across the squat, sturdy bridge to the Ile de la Cité, was a short one. The growing heat had already dispelled the morning coolness, and the scattering of traffic along the boulevard moved with deliberateness and minimal exertion.

It was a walk Aichele had made almost every morning for twenty-five years, and now it gave him an odd feeling to know that when he passed through the unprepossessing entrance to the Préfecture he would be doing so as just an-

other citizen. And what struck him, too, was the fact that he would not be tracing a line of evidence as it led, step by step, to the perpetrator of a crime. Instead, the prisoner already waited in his cell at the Conciergerie, and unknown to him, Aichele would make a quick and final judgment of his guilt or innocence. He reached for the door, imagining the evidence standing and speaking out clearly to one and all, but knowing, too, the impossibility of that hope.

The joke among the police was that boredom, not the heat, drove the criminals from Paris each August along with everyone else. The empty halls of the Préfecture attested to the number of police who consequently took their leaves at that same time. Aichele had hoped to spot a familiar face, but there was none among the few who passed by, studying handfuls of papers or involved in conversation.

Finally, a voice said, "May I help you?"

"Why yes," Aichele said, answering a young sergeant of detectives, and instinctively noting that his common appearance would serve him well in police work. It was always an advantage to be able to lull suspects into dropping their guard through an inherently unobtrusive appearance.

"I'm looking for Inspector Leroux," Aichele said.

"Sorry," the sergeant said, his natural enthusiasm infusing even this apologetic remark with energy, "but the inspector is out of town and won't be back until next week. I'm assigned to his office, is there something I can do? I am Sergeant Dulac."

"Paul Aichele."

The sergeant paused as they shook hands. "Not Inspector Aichele?"

Aichele shrugged. "Retired."

The sergeant grinned broadly. "Let me tell you what a pleasure it is to meet you, sir. I've admired your work since I joined the force, and I would also like to say that I think you were treated unfairly, and there are many more like myself . . ."

"I appreciate your sympathy, sergeant, and there is something you can do for me. I've been following a case in the *Gazette* which has captured my curiosity in these desultory days. It concerns a M. Swann, who seems to have killed a Mme. Fontaine."

"Yes, I'm very familiar with the case. It's not complicated at all. Swann was her lover and murdered her to inherit her fortune."

"Inherit her fortune?"

"Yes. Of course, that hasn't been publicized. We can't give it all away in the papers, you

know. But when Mme. Fontaine's will was read, it named Swann as sole beneficiary."

"Which came as a shock to the rest of the family?"

"Most definitely."

"Inspector Leroux was quoted as saying the evidence against Swann was 'overwhelming,' so I assume you have more than his inheritance to hold against him. A murder weapon, for example?"

"No, unfortunately we didn't find the weapon. But we do have the jacket he wore when he committed the crime. He had it hidden when we arrested him."

"Mme. Fontaine was stabbed, correct? So there was blood on the jacket?"

"Quite a bit, which often happens in a stabbing case as you know, of course. We can take a look if you'd like, I'd be happy to show it to you."

"That would be most interesting, sergeant."

The clerk in the evidence room, a man who had been at his job behind the massive oak desk even before Aichele joined the force, recognized him immediately. They exchanged pleasantries while the sergeant unlocked a cabinet and laid a gold colored satin smoking jacket out on the table. It was double-breasted in style, with a shimmering black lining and

a narrow gold sash held in place by several wide loops of fabric sewn onto the back. Several large blotches of dried blood, amidst a field of smaller spatters, were spread fully across the front of the jacket.

"Where did you say this was found?" asked Aichele, rubbing the material of one of the lapels absentmindedly between his fingers.

"It was in Swann's coach, hidden under the seat. And it was a nice piece of detective work by Inspector Leroux that connected him to it, if I do say so myself. Swann was being questioned here when one of our patrolmen spotted the jacket in the carriage while it was parked right outside the Préfecture. Leroux was informed, without Swann's knowledge, of course, and the inspector asked Swann to describe the smoking jackets he owned. This matched one of the descriptions exactly. In fact, Swann admitted it was his, but claimed to have no idea how the bloodstains got there."

"And what led you to suspect him in the first place?"

"He was the last person to see Mme. Fontaine alive. He had paid his usual Tuesday night visit—the affair was no secret to the rest of the family, that is, her son and daughter—and left at nine o'clock, as always. At around half past ten, Clarisse

Fontaine went to her mother's rooms to say goodnight and found her dead. We traced Swann to a dinner party. He had not tried to escape, or even to conceal his whereabouts."

"Did you think it was strange that Swann would so effectively dispose of a murder weapon, yet go to a dinner party leaving a bloody jacket under his carriage seat?"

"No. Disposing of the jacket was probably more complicated than simply tossing a knife off into the darkness somewhere between the Fontaine estate and the dinner party. The important thing is that he kept his appointment. You see, as Inspector Leroux theorizes, the one way for Swann to get away with such a brazen crime was to act brazenly innocent, as if nothing at all had happened."

"Yes," said Aichele, "I can see how that could be true."

"Anyway," said the sergeant, "our job is to catch criminals, not account for their behavior."

"So it is." Aichele looked up from the jacket and saw a large manila envelope on a shelf in the cabinet. "And that would be the will?"

"Yes, I'll get it for you."

The will was a five-page handwritten document listing all the family's property and business relationships. The final lines, above Mme. Fon-

taine's signature, stated unequivocally that everything mentioned therein was to go to M. Swann. The flap of the envelope held half of a broken wax seal; the other half adhered to the body of the envelope. They fit together perfectly when the flap was closed, which Aichele did, mechanically, two or three times in a row, as if he were working a small toy. Below the seal was the signature of Andre Dupré, attorney at law, and a date, February 12, 1883.

"This was on file with the attorney?" said Aichele.

"No, it was kept in Mme. Fontaine's safe at the estate. M. Dupré only signed and dated the envelope as witness to the sealing."

"Did he prepare the will?"

"No, Mme. Fontaine wrote it out herself, but there was nothing unusual about that. She had managed the family's business affairs for some time, even during the last years of her husband's life. He was disabled, I think. Of course, the reason for her secrecy is obvious now."

"So neither Dupré nor anyone else aside from Mme. Fontaine actually saw the will before it was opened."

"Apparently not."

"Could it have been tampered with?"

"Well, anything's possible, sir, but M. Dupré conducted the

reading of the will, and he swears the seal was unbroken, that the handwriting is positively Mme. Fontaine's, and that his signature appears on the envelope just as he put it there in 1883."

"And this was how soon after M. Fontaine died?"

"He died in January of '82, a little more than a year before this will was written."

Sergeant Dulac returned the will and the jacket to the cabinet, closed the door, and locked it. He left the key on the clerk's desk as they passed.

"Would it be possible, sergeant, for us to visit the Fontaine estate?" Aichele asked. "There are some possibilities I would like to explore which, I believe, will throw some interesting light on this case." He saw the sergeant's hesitation growing as he mulled the request over. Up to this point, he had talked with Aichele and shown him evidence without thinking twice, but a visit to the Fontaines was clearly outside the bounds of normal procedure, even for such a distinguished civilian.

"I realize I'm putting you in an awkward position, sergeant, but I'm asking only for a short visit, no more than fifteen minutes."

The sergeant's expression relaxed slowly. "I think we can,

inspector, considering who you are. There's nothing pressing for me here, and the Fontaines did promise their full cooperation."

"Excellent. I'll even hire the coach, but we do need to stop off briefly along the way. I have an important message to deliver."

The Fontaine estate, owned previously by the famous Montansier family, was on Rue St. Dominique, in St. Germain. On the way there, Sergeant Dulac explained the circumstances of Mme. Fontaine's death more fully. She was to have left the day after on a tour of family properties in Algeria. Her two grown children, Richard, age thirty, and Clarisse, age nineteen, lived at home. Neither of them noticed anything unusual the night of the murder. They were aware of Swann's visit, though he used a side entrance and he and their mother kept to themselves in Mme. Fontaine's rooms. Clarisse made the tragic discovery some time after Swann's carriage had departed. The police were summoned immediately.

"Why," asked Aichele, "do you suppose Mme. Fontaine left the entire family fortune to Swann, and nothing for her own children?"

"That seems obvious," the sergeant answered. "They were

lovers, and our M. Swann is as good at seducing minds as he is hearts. But there are other possibilities, too. He could have blackmailed her. Richard tells us Swann's affair with his mother began some years before his father's death, and maybe Swann threatened to publicize that fact. Or he might have somehow tricked her into doing it, who knows? Aside from giving away his motive, it doesn't matter anyway. He can't legally benefit from his crime, so as soon as he's convicted the inheritance reverts to the rightful heirs, namely, Richard and Clarisse."

The Fontaine estate was just as Aichele had imagined it. The location on the eastern edge of the Quartier St. Germain meant it would be of a more modest scale than the estates of the nobility in the western portion of the district. Just the same, the grounds were kept in the finest Baroque style, and the three storied house was sufficiently grand.

As they stepped from their carriage and walked toward the entrance, Sergeant Dulac pointed out a short extension of roadway, leading away from the circular main drive and ending alongside a high, squarely trimmed hedge a few meters from the far corner of the house.

"That is where Swann's carriage waited during his visits. As you can see, there is a clear view from the house, so his coming and going was quite open."

They waited in an anteroom while the butler announced their visit, and were then shown to a salon where Clarisse Fontaine awaited them. She had an air about her of extreme austerity in both appearance and spirit. Her complexion was pale, and her expression thoroughly wan. Her unadorned black mourning dress drooped from her thin, fragile figure. She seemed rather drained of emotion, and much older than her nineteen years.

"Mlle. Fontaine," the sergeant said, nervously, "I hate to disturb you, but, this is Inspector Aichele." He presented Aichele as if he had just discovered him at his side. "Retired inspector, of course. He has taken an interest in your mother's tragic death."

"I was under the impression that the investigation of my mother's murder had been completed, and the killer apprehended." There was a lively bitterness in Clarisse's voice which belied her apparent listlessness.

"Oh, that's absolutely true, but the inspector..."

A door opened behind Clarisse, and a man came into the

room. He was slightly taller than average, and stockily built. He wore a goatee which, had it been a full beard, might have made him the imposing figure he clearly thought himself to be.

"What the sergeant means is that Inspector Aichele is the first of what will become a veritable parade of police officers, from France or who knows where, who will traipse through our home, otherwise known as 'the scene of the crime.' Unhappily for your plans, gentlemen, our house is not a sideshow attraction; now please be so kind as to leave."

The sergeant stood, frozen in place.

"Begging your pardon, M. Fontaine," Aichele said, "but you misunderstand our intentions. I am here, first, because Inspector Leroux is on vacation and cannot be here himself and, second, because certain minor but unresolved details have been raised concerning this case. The police are as you say, *mademoiselle*, confident they have your mother's killer in custody. To be sure, the details I speak of are minor points; however, they are just the sort of things clever lawyers are notorious for exploiting. And I need not remind you what a compounding of the tragedy it would be were Mme. Fontaine's killer to go free."

Aichele's explanation seemed to satisfy Richard, at least for the moment. "Very well then, inspector, but be quick about it, we do have our lives to get on with. I'm sure I would be as distressed as anyone to see Swann go free, although frankly nothing that happens to him can bring our mother back."

"Or Henri," Clarisse added, sadly.

"Henri? Who is Henri?" Aichele asked.

"Henri is my sister's cat. He seems to have wandered away during all the recent confusion. I'm sure he'll return eventually."

"No," said Clarisse, with surprising conviction, "he will never be back, I know it."

"As you can see, we've suffered under an extraordinary strain these past few days," said Richard, laying his hand on his sister's shoulder.

She pushed it off. "Henri is gone forever." Her eyes swelled slightly with tears, their redness suddenly contrasting with her colorless face.

There was an awkward silence, then Aichele said to Richard, "I would like to see your mother's safe and examine its contents, if possible. Then we will be on our way."

Aichele and the sergeant followed Richard upstairs, and as they did so they could hear Clarisse sobbing in the affected

though not insincere manner of women of her class.

The safe was in a small office adjacent to Mme. Fontaine's bedroom. It was a substantial looking black cube, slightly less than a meter on a side, standing against one wall. Richard took a slip of paper from a drawer in the large, ornately carved desk and, kneeling alongside the safe, read the combination from it as he turned the brass knob to the respective numbers.

"Was the combination always kept in the desk?" asked Aichele.

"Yes, but no one had a key to the drawer except Mother." Richard swung the door open.

"May I?" said Aichele, indicating some papers and envelopes of various sizes on the middle shelf of the safe.

"Of course."

Aichele scooped the material together between his hands and set it on the desk top. Then he sat down and began arranging the items in some sort of order. When he had finished, he took the reading glass from the desk and examined those documents which bore, in red wax, the imprint of the family seal.

"Where is this seal kept? In the safe?" he asked.

"No," said Richard. "Mother kept it there in the desk."

Aichele had singled out a particular envelope, its flap still sealed closed. "This is labeled

as a rental contract. Does that mean the documents inside were sealed on the date shown here on the envelope?"

"Of course. But the seal was one of Mother's rather old fashioned formalities. It has no legal standing. You may open the envelope if you like."

"Oh, that is hardly necessary. I would like to have a look at the seal itself, though."

"In the upper left-hand drawer."

The seal was a small cylinder of carved ebony. Affixed to one end was a brass disk with a coat of arms worked delicately into it. Aichele held it under the glass, studying it closely. "Is this the only seal you have?"

"Yes, my father commissioned it years ago."

"And it's been in use ever since?"

"Yes. But if it's family history you are curious about, Father had that written up, too. The volume is downstairs in the library, and you are welcome to look at it. I, however, have several important business appointments to prepare for, so I hope you are about finished."

"We are finished," Aichele said as he gathered the documents together and returned them to the safe. "Unless you had something more, sergeant."

"Nothing more here," said the sergeant blankly.

"Then we will be on our way, M. Fontaine, and thank you for your help, you've been most accommodating. We can find our own way out."

Richard left them at the foot of the stairs, but instead of continuing toward the front door Aichele stopped. "Something just occurred to me. Something I'd like to ask Mlle. Fontaine."

Clarisse sat just as they had left her, though now she was thumbing through a picture book.

"Excuse us, mademoiselle," said Aichele, "but there is one more thing I would like to ask. I realize the relationship between your mother and M. Swann is a delicate subject, so any response you might have to what I am about to say will be kept in strictest confidence."

"What is it you want to know, inspector?"

"Swann certainly seems to have been a model of discretion, coming and going by the side entrance."

"M. Swann felt no need to draw attention to himself. He was quite considerate, up to the end."

"Yes," said Aichele, "that seems true. I'm sure he was even more cautious and tactful when your father was alive. Nevertheless, do you recall, as a girl, any visits by Swann to your household?"

Clarisse's eyes flashed with anger at Aichele's insinuation. Sergeant Dulac leaped to her defense. "Inspector! That kind of questioning is not in order here! Mademoiselle, please accept my apologies, and the apologies of the Paris police."

"None are necessary," Clarisse said, in a composed, icy tone, looking straight into Aichele's eyes. "The inspector is plainly mistaken. There was never a need for the caution or tact he mentioned because the circumstances he alluded to never existed. And now I believe the two of you have overstayed your welcome." She looked down at the book in her lap and slowly turned the page.

The sergeant held his temper until they were in the carriage; then he slammed the door shut with such force that the whole coach rocked from one side to the other.

"I want an explanation, inspector. I went along with your curiosity out of respect for you, and what you've done in return is insult Mlle. Fontaine and embarrass me and the department."

Aichele stared thoughtfully out the small, dirty window. They turned onto the spacious Boulevard St. Germain. "No one regretted bringing up such a topic with Clarisse more than I. But it was necessary."

"Necessary for what?"

"Necessary to elicit the facts of the case."

Sergeant Dulac frowned. "Inspector, or should I say M. Aichele, since you have apparently forgotten you are no longer a member of the Paris police, the facts of this case have already been 'elicited,' and I must say I'm beginning to get curious about your interest in it."

"Indeed?" said Aichele.

"We were told Swann had many influential friends. I thought they had abandoned him, at least until now."

"My interest in this case is my own, sergeant, though I can assure you Swann's friends have not abandoned him."

"If they think they can buy his innocence, they are sadly mistaken."

"If Swann's friends could buy his innocence, they would have done so long ago without the likes of you or me knowing the first thing about it."

The sergeant snorted, softly and contemptuously.

"Yes, innocence can be bought—so can the truth." Aichele laughed and then leaned close to the sergeant. "Truth can even be created. But the question is, what do you do with it once you've got it?" He straightened back up. "The truth is forever being bought, traded, stolen, foisted upon the un-

wary, stolen from the careless, locked in safes or closets, buried in the ground. But it never stops existing. It is there —always—for the detectives to discover, right?" He laughed again.

The sergeant's whole body tensed in reaction to Aichele's eccentric-sounding comments. "We have a strong case against Swann, a strong factual case."

"Which exposes the truth, or conceals it?"

"Exposes it." The sergeant attempted to sound certain, but his voice slipped, showing his vacillation between anger and curiosity.

"Then why did Richard Fontaine tell you Swann's affair with his mother began before his father's death, while Clarisse so clearly denies it? Where is the truth there?"

"Both were telling the truth as they knew it. The affair is not the sort of thing a young girl would know about."

"Correct. But it is exactly the kind of thing a young woman like Clarisse would deduce, now, years later, from the rumors and unexplained memories of her childhood. A chance appearance or two by Swann, perhaps, which only now take on their true significance."

"But even if she did know, she would never admit it to us."

"You do agree that she would know, however."

The sergeant thought for a moment. "Well, I agree it would be very likely."

"Then she must have been lying to us."

"No. I couldn't say that. I did not have the impression Clarisse was lying."

"Good. Our instincts agree, she was much too convincing."

"Then you are accusing Richard of lying?"

Aichele smiled. "Not necessarily. He himself could have been repeating rumors. More important, if we assume Clarisse was telling the truth, we have an interesting question regarding the will, wouldn't you say?"

"An obvious question," the sergeant answered. "You could ask why Mme. Fontaine left her entire estate to Swann after knowing him intimately for no more than the year between her husband's death and her writing of the will. But we can't very well ask Mme. Fontaine, can we, since Swann happens to have stabbed her to death."

"Or else the will is a forgery."

"The will is genuine. Dupré can attest to that."

"I respectfully disagree, sergeant, and would like to hold out the possibility that the will is an expert forgery which has, to this point, fooled everyone involved. And I also think the significance of that fact is a bit

more complicated than you realize."

"What would be complicated about it? If you can prove the will is a forgery, it would be the final nail in Swann's coffin."

"I do need to see it once more to be absolutely certain, but that can wait until tomorrow," said Aichele. "For now, I will drop you at the Préfecture, and from there you will pay a visit to M. Swann at the Conciergerie. Find out where he was on the night of December twentieth of last year, at approximately eleven thirty. I am going to the Café Athénée in Montmartre for lunch, and I will meet you again at the Préfecture at eight sharp tomorrow morning. Is that clear?"

"No!" said the sergeant, laughing with surprise. "It is not clear! I am the police officer here, and you are an interested citizen that I've done the favor of spending the morning with. If you have proof that the will is a forgery, let's have a look at it. Otherwise, I have more important duties than running errands for you."

"Yes, those important duties. There is such a press of work this time of year. I'm sure you have mountains of requisitions to fill out. Which do you need more, blotter paper or ink? Or lost property forms? We never seemed to have enough of those."

The carriage stopped at the Préfecture, but the sergeant remained seated. "Tell me what it is and I'll look at the will," he said.

"In the morning," Aichele answered. "And don't forget, eleven thirty on the night of December twentieth."

"Very well." The sergeant acted as if he were about to say something more, but then he stepped out of the carriage and stood in the street, watching as the driver snapped his whip and the horses wheeled away toward Montmartre.

Aichele was awake earlier than usual the next morning, which allowed time for an especially leisurely breakfast. He did not buy a *Gazette*, preferring instead to contemplate the coming day. His anticipation was much like the feeling he had when, as a detective, the evidence began to take shape and point toward a resolution. Yet the thrust of today's resolution would be to free an innocent person, and he wondered how far events would progress toward that end before he would have to provide a guilty one to take his place.

Aichele did not walk directly to the Préfecture but went several blocks out of his way, to Mrs. Poll's apartment.

"I'm sorry to impose, Mrs. Poll," he said, "but I have a very important favor to ask of you, for which, of course, I will gladly pay you a day's wages."

"That's hardly necessary, inspector," she answered. "What good are we if we can't do one another a favor once in a while?"

"Right you are," Aichele said, with a smile. "Now, I've arranged for you to pick up a M. Claude Goudeau at Bellanger, the carriage rental firm where he is employed as a driver. Here is cab fare and an address where you are to bring M. Goudeau as quickly as possible. I will be there waiting; when you arrive, bring him directly to me, not letting anyone deter you under any circumstances. I have a few minutes' business at the Préfecture; then I'll be on my way and should arrive there well ahead of you."

"Then they've taken you back, at the police?"

"No, far from it, Mrs. Poll. But you are being most helpful, and I will explain everything later. For now, fetch M. Goudeau and I will see you shortly."

Sergeant Dulac was at his desk when Aichele strode briskly past, beckoning him to follow. The clerk in the evidence room handed the cabinet key to Aichele out of habit, without saying a word or even looking up from his work. The

sergeant caught up as Aichele set Mme. Fontaine's will on the table, closing the flap of the envelope to reform the broken seal.

"I need a glass, sergeant."

The sergeant rustled loudly through one of the drawers and handed a small magnifying glass to Aichele, slamming the door shut with a pronounced shove.

"Aha! What luck!" said Aichele, oblivious to the sergeant's dramatics and peering intently through the glass at the seal. "This will is in fact a forgery. And what did you find out from our friend M. Swann?"

The sergeant, looking like the morning was moving along much too quickly for his liking, dutifully said, "He couldn't remember what he was doing the night of the twentieth. I had expected as much, so I took it upon myself to refresh his memory. It was a Thursday night, at the peak of the Christmas social season. He then recalled spending the evening at a supper party given by one Mme. Verduin. I contacted her, and she confirmed his story, and there were half a dozen or so other guests who can presumably also account for Swann's attendance, at least until a quarter to one when the party broke up."

"Excellent work, sergeant.

Obviously, then, Swann could not have been on the Pont de l'Alma at eleven thirty on the night of December twentieth."

"No," said the sergeant with a sigh, "I suppose not. Nor could he have been ringing the bells of Notre Dame, or painting mustaches on the portraits in the Louvre."

"You're in a fine sense of humor," said Aichele.

"I don't see the importance of Swann's socializing in the middle of last winter, let alone whether or not he was at some bridge or another."

"You will. But one thing at a time. Here, take a look at the seal under the glass."

The sergeant bent over the table, looking down at the impression in the small red oval.

"Do you see the irregularity in the border, at the lower right-hand edge? It's quite distinct."

"Yes," the sergeant said.

"It's made by a dent in the seal itself. I suspect it was dropped accidentally onto a hard or sharp corner of some sort, exactly what is not important. What is important is that, from then on, every time the seal was used, the impression made in the wax bore that same irregularity you see in the margin. Yesterday I arranged Mme. Fontaine's papers in chronological sequence, and looked closely

at each one's seal. Luckily, among the random scratches and nicks the seal accumulated over the course of its life, the flaw you see there stands out quite clearly. However, it first appears on a document dated June 12, 1887. It does not appear on the document immediately preceding that one, namely a rental agreement dated March 16, 1887. The dent responsible for the flaw must have been incurred sometime between those two dates, and any document showing the flaw could not possibly have been sealed before March 16, 1887. In other words, this envelope and the will it contains are complete fabrications, substituted for the real ones sometime after March of last year."

The sergeant looked again at the seal to be absolutely certain of what he was seeing. "This removes any question at all about Swann's guilt, since he is the beneficiary of both Mme. Fontaine's death and this forgery."

"It certainly appears that way, doesn't it? Or should I say, it is meant to appear that way."

The sergeant set the glass down and gave Aichele a look of suspicious anticipation. "You're trying to tell me Swann is innocent?"

"Oh, I'll tell you that straight away—Swann is innocent. But

your task as a police officer is to arrest the guilty, and I hope that can be accomplished in one more visit to the Fontaine estate."

The sergeant stood sullenly, without moving.

"Come now, sergeant, I promise none of the embarrassment of our last encounter with the Fontaines. And I've already arranged to meet with someone there, so I will be going with or without you."

"All right. But this is the end of it. When we return I'm preparing the evidence you have uncovered regarding the forgery and turning it over, with thanks of course, to await action by Inspector Leroux."

Aichele smiled. "What more could I ask? And now, there is no time to waste."

Clarisse and Richard Fontaine had just finished breakfast when the butler led Aichele and Sergeant Dulac through the double doors and out onto the patio. The morning light was clear and splendid, giving the luxurious but neatly trimmed greenery around them the effect of flashing emeralds. The Fontaines were clearly disappointed to glance up and see the two visitors.

"Well, if it isn't our friend the sergeant," Richard said, with

the humorless sarcasm that so naturally colored his speech. "And he's brought ex-inspector Aichele along. Did I tell you, Clarisse, that I asked a few friends in city government about M. Aichele yesterday? It seems his recent retirement was not entirely voluntary. There were insinuations to which he was unable to reply effectively, and so chose premature retirement. Now, gentlemen, my sister and I have been through a trying period which has not been made any less so by your little visits, so I trust your business today is brief."

Sergeant Dulac began to say something about not taking up any more time than was absolutely necessary, but Aichele interrupted. "We will take neither more nor less of your time than is needed," he said. "We are here because we have uncovered firm evidence that your mother's will, the one the police have in evidence, is a forgery."

"Bravo!" Richard said, plainly mocking Aichele. "But the relevance of that astonishing bit of detection escapes me. Is not the beneficiary of said forgery about to be convicted of murder, at which time, his 'inheritance' goes to the proper recipients—my sister and myself?"

"We always were suspicious of the will," added Clarisse, tempering her brother's unfriendly remarks.

"Of course," said Aichele. "But then, as Richard told Sergeant Dulac, your mother was intimately acquainted with Swann since well before your father's death, a fact which added considerably to the will's apparent authenticity."

"Why on earth did you say that, Richard?" Clarisse said, looking quizzically at her brother.

Richard cleared his throat self-consciously. "I'm afraid there is a misunderstanding. I made the mistake of repeating an allegation in front of the sergeant—I was speaking with his superior at the time—which I brought up for the sole purpose of making it unequivocally clear that the allegation had no basis in fact, and was to go no further."

"Then," said Aichele with a chuckle, "please accept my apologies, and Sergeant Dulac's as well. But you can see how this 'misunderstanding' helped persuade the police to initially accept the will as genuine."

"Of course," said Richard, trying to hurry the conversation to an end. "We forgive the police for not suspecting the forgery sooner, and we applaud them for discovering it now. And if you have nothing more, there are preparations which require our attention."

"Unfortunately," said Aichele, "the discovery has raised a

new question. You see, we know the forgery is an expert one, the work of a virtuoso, in fact. It required not only several pages of your mother's handwriting, including her signature, but M. Dupré's signature as well. And we know it was done some time later than March of a year ago. There are scores of forgers in Paris, but only a handful possess the peculiar talent necessary for such an exacting task. One such fellow is a Montmartre character named Jean Luc, like others of his stripe a habitué of the Café Athénée, which I visited yesterday. I learned there that Luc came into quite a large sum of money a year ago last spring, and had the same good fortune on two more occasions between then and last December. On the twentieth of that month, at about eleven thirty P.M., Jean Luc fell to his death from the Pont de l'Alma. The sergeant can confirm that Luc's demise was ruled a suicide by the authorities."

"Why yes," the sergeant said, "it was the first case I was involved with after my promotion."

"Then you might remember," continued Aichele, "Inspector Leroux's comment, as quoted in the *Gazette*, that what was a significant loss for M. Luc was in actuality a small gain in the overall character of the Left

Bank. The death was declared a suicide because no one came forward who actually saw him pushed into the freezing water, nor were the Paris police interested in discovering any such witnesses. Had the death been seriously investigated, as I did yesterday in Montmartre, it would have been obvious that M. Luc was no candidate for suicide. He had not only spent the last six months of his life happily squandering large sums of money, but on the very night of his death he had bragged of having an appointment to receive another 'grant' from his 'patron.' Luc's service to his 'patron' began at exactly the time we suspect your mother's will was forged. Then he engaged in a predictable bit of blackmail, but instead of handing over another 'grant' on the night of the twentieth, Luc's 'patron' silenced him forever."

"You are saying this 'patron' was Swann?" said Clarisse.

"Yes," added Richard. "If the circumstances you describe link Jean Luc to the will, they just as certainly link Swann to Luc. So do you suggest Swann be guillotined twice?"

"Hardly. Swann was attending a supper party at the hour of Luc's death, and there are half a dozen witnesses to confirm it."

"But if Swann contracted with a forger," said Clarisse, "why

could he have not done the same for the murder of the forger? There are such men in Paris, are there not, who will kill for a price?"

"Possible, but not likely," Aichele said. "You see, a hired murderer would eventually present his 'patron' with the same threat of blackmail as the forger. Whoever hired Luc to forge your mother's will killed him. And it was not Swann who killed him."

"I don't understand," said Clarisse. "You seem to think Swann was not responsible for the forgery, yet why would anyone else concoct a will naming him as sole beneficiary?"

"That is precisely the question we are left with, mademoiselle. The forged will was planted in your mother's safe to make it appear that Swann had a motive for killing her. This could only have been done by someone who, first, had access to the safe and, second, would himself benefit from your mother's death."

"Enough," said Richard, his voice as low as a whisper. Then he slammed his fist on the table, bouncing the delicate coffee cups and heavier breakfast utensils out of their places. "These veiled accusations the 'inspector' is making are as insufferable as they are specious, and I will not tolerate them for

a moment more. Either the two of you leave immediately, or I shall have you thrown out. And rest assured, sergeant, that your superiors will hear of this."

Sergeant Dulac looked genuinely stricken, and had opened his mouth to attempt an explanation when an uproar, moving through the house toward them, distracted everyone on the patio. They turned in time to see Mrs. Poll march through the double doors, the Fontaines' protesting butler trailing behind. With them was a tall and rather thin man, obviously uncomfortable on the patio of a St. Germain estate, his workingman's cap clutched nervously in both hands.

"I brought him here just as you asked, inspector," Mrs. Poll announced. "And lucky thing it was, too. He was leaving on holiday tomorrow."

"Thank you," said Aichele. "May I present Claude Goudreau, Swann's driver the night of Mme. Fontaine's death."

"Sergeant," Richard said, pushing his chair back and for the first time standing up, "you have exactly thirty seconds to remove yourself and your entourage from my property."

"We will be leaving momentarily," Aichele said, the calm authority in his voice countermanning Richard's tense demand. "And I daresay we will

take your mother's killer with us."

"My mother's killer is in the Conciergrie!" Richard snapped.

"Your mother's killer is here on this patio," replied Aichele. Then, turning to Goudeau, he said, "When you brought Swann here that night, you parked in the usual spot, did you not?"

"Yes, sir," Goudeau was looking nervously around, his hands furiously worrying the brim of his cap. "But I went over everything with the police."

"I'm sure," said Aichele. "Nevertheless, there are several questions I need to ask. How long did you wait for M. Swann?"

"About two hours."

"And when you left, where did you go?"

"To Neuilly. M. Swann was attending a social function there."

"You went directly to Neuilly?"

"Yes, sir."

"And that was where the police found you, and then you proceeded to the Préfecture."

"That's right. And while I was waiting, I was talking to one of the patrolmen, and he happened to poke his nose inside the coach and saw a jacket or something, which seemed to be quite the thing at the time."

"Did you leave the carriage unattended at any time during

the night, either here or in Neuilly?"

"No, sir."

"Not once, not even for a moment?"

"No, sir, that would be strictly against regulations. We're never to leave our coaches. It would cost me my job if I did."

"I understand that, M. Goudeau, but there is more at stake here than your coachman's job. In a few weeks someone will be executed for the murder of Mme. Fontaine. If you remain silent now, that person will be an innocent man. If you tell the truth, perhaps the real murderer will pay for the crime."

Goudeau exchanged darting, worried glances with Clarisse. His fingers dug deeper into his cap.

Suddenly, Clarisse spoke out. "Tell them, M. Goudeau, it will be all right."

Goudeau looked regretfully at Clarisse, then back at Aichele. "I did leave the coach once, while it was here, but only for an instant, no more than a minute or two."

"But long enough for someone to slip a bloody jacket under the seat?" Aichele said.

"I suppose so."

"And when was this?"

"About half an hour before M. Swann left the house."

"What made you leave the coach?"

"I heard a noise. There's a hedge alongside the drive there, where we park, and I heard a noise coming from the other side. It sounded like a young lady, sir, who'd been frightened by something. I looked as best I could from the seat, but it was a dark night and I couldn't see a thing. And I couldn't just sit there like nothing was happening. So I went over to take a look, and I still couldn't see anything so I pushed through the hedge and just as I came out the other side somebody runs smack into me, and then takes off into the dark."

"Who was it that ran into you?"

Goudeau paused, and his cap stopped moving. "It was Mlle. Fontaine."

"You're sure."

"Absolutely, sir."

Richard drummed the fingers of one hand on the table, then snapped them up into a fist, which he rubbed thoughtfully against his chin. "I'm sure my sister had a perfectly legitimate reason for being in her own garden, even at that hour."

All attention turned to Clarisse, but her only response was a brittle and vulnerable silence as she stared at the breakfast litter spread in front of her—a crumpled napkin, a crust of bread, and a fork lying across one of the thin china plates. Her

hand closed, trembling, around her empty coffee cup. "I was there to meet M. Swann," she said quietly.

"To meet Swann?" Richard asked, sounding unable to believe what he heard.

"He slipped a note under my door earlier that evening, one which I was to destroy immediately, in which he professed his admiration for me and asked if I could meet him in the garden, near his carriage, at half past eight." Her face began to twitch, and she sobbed once as tears began flowing from her eyes. "I went there as he said, but all I found was poor Henri. Dead!"

"Your cat?" said Aichele.

"Yes. I cried out, but then I realized I mustn't be discovered. I wanted to run but I couldn't take my eyes from Henri, and when I finally did I collided with M. Goudeau. There was nothing I could say, I was so frightened. I ran to the house as fast as I could."

"But I thought your cat had just wandered off."

Richard tilted his head slightly and sympathetically toward his sister. "I saw Henri here on the patio the next morning. He indeed has only wandered off, and I'm sure he will eventually return. As for whatever it was Clarisse saw, had it been a cat the gardeners

certainly would have reported it in the morning."

"You told no one of this before now?" Aichele asked Clarisse.

"No one," she answered.

"That's understandable enough," said Richard. "The night was dark, you were lured there by a mysterious note, it is only natural that you would not want to mention whatever nightmarish fantasy your anxious mind fabricated."

"Oh, it's no fabrication, sir," said Goudeau. "I saw the cat there myself, just after made-moiselle ran off. A little white fellow, white as snow. Had his throat cut, poor little thing."

"But in the darkness, and considering the situation, you could have confused a pile of rags, or anything else, for a cat," Richard said.

"You still claim to have seen Henri the next day?" Aichele said to Richard.

Richard's face paled ever so slightly, then he shrugged. "I might have been mistaken."

"But you told me you were sure," said Clarisse. "You insisted on telling me time after time that you had seen Henri right here on the patio."

Richard glanced, somewhat searchingly, at the other two men. "I was trying to comfort you as best I could, Clarisse."

"But you knew he was dead all the time," she said.

"Unfortunately, yes. I found him the next morning. I had no idea what happened to him, but there was no point in adding to the unhappy events of the night before, so I disposed of the body and decided to tell you I had seen him alive."

"When in the morning?" Clarisse said, with an intensity to her question that seemed, in itself, to dry the tears from her face.

"I don't know exactly. Around eight or nine, I suppose."

"Richard, I was still awake at dawn, and I went to the garden, to the exact spot where I had seen Henri, and he was gone."

"Well, it could have been earlier."

"No! You can't have been there earlier. I was there at first light."

Richard walked a few steps out onto the patio. Clarisse stood up from the table, her eyes following him. Turning back to her, his face suddenly drawn downward in shame, he said, "I'm afraid Henri is dead, and I killed him. I'm truly sorry. It was not something I meant to do. He was never a favorite of mine, but that evening I decided to offer him a bowl of cream in the kitchen. As I carried him in, something startled him, he scratched my hands in his panic, and I threw him to the floor, much more violently

than I realized because he suddenly lay there dead. The blood was rather profuse, which accounts for this coachman's opinion that his throat was cut. I took him into the garden, fully intending to properly dispose of him in the morning. Of course, after what happened later that night, there was no possibility of sleep, so I went into the garden and buried the body in some rubbish which was to be burned the next day."

"M. Fontaine," said Aichele, "the agility of your 'confessions' is most amazing. You seem, just as we manage to verify one set of facts, to have danced away from those same facts mere moments before our arrival. But you say the cat scratched your hands badly enough to cause you to lose control of yourself, yet your hands show no sign of clawmarks. And this supposedly occurred less than a week ago."

Richard smiled bitterly at Aichele. "They were not that severe, but I cannot force you to believe me, can I? And don't you think the death of Henri the cat is somewhat beneath the attention of the Paris police? The matter is now between my sister and myself, and I will attempt to make proper amends."

"And will you also make amends for murdering your mother?"

"You're being preposterous," Richard answered, before any of the others had fully comprehended Aichele's question.

"You killed Henri," Aichele continued, "not in a fit of rage but because you needed a source of blood to splatter on the smoking jacket you secretly removed from your mother's rooms. Then you left the body in the path, where it would frighten your sister and draw M. Goudeau away from his coach long enough for you to hide the bloody jacket under the seat. It was an intricate plan, Richard, and it worked to perfection—the forgery was in place, its forger silenced, the jacket awaited its inevitable discovery, and Clarisse and Goudeau, the only ones who might suspect anything out of the ordinary, were in no position to tell anyone what they saw. All that remained was the final act. The family fortune was yours, the consequences were Swann's."

Richard stared coolly back at Aichele, drawing upon his last reserves of confidence. "That is an intriguing bit of conjecture," he said, "but you forget it was Swann who wrote the note to my sister, and lured her to the garden at the opportune moment."

"The forger's art is not limited to wills. You of all people should know that, Richard," Aichele said.

"Then produce this forgery!" Richard said, laughing smugly. "And if you can't? The only hint of its existence comes from a girl desperately in need of an explanation for her midnight wanderings."

"But I still have the note," Clarisse said, responding without thinking to her brother's claim. "It's in my lacquered box."

A wave of satisfaction swept over Aichele, as if the keystone in a great arch had just been dropped into place and the structure stood, alone and unfettered. Richard Fontaine took advantage of this lapse and sprinted by the table and into the house. Aichele and the sergeant raced after him, but their pursuit had only begun as Richard disappeared down the hall and into Clarisse's bedroom. The sergeant threw open the door, with Aichele close behind, only to confront Richard standing in the center of the room, the corner of a small envelope held in his fingertips as it was consumed by dull orange flames. He smiled at them as the pieces of charred paper drifted lightly to the floor.

Clarisse stood in the doorway, staring in shock at the splintered remains of the lacquered Chinese box, the knickknacks and papers it once contained strewn across the floor.

"Gentlemen," said Richard, "you have an accused murderer behind bars and I suggest you keep him there. Especially you, sergeant, if you value your career. Thanks to M. Aichele, it has been demonstrated that someone, possibly this M. Luc, though that is sheer speculation, forged my mother's will. The one who stood to profit by that forgery is M. Swann, who also lured my sister to the vicinity of his coach with a false love note. I shudder to think of Swann's motives for drawing Clarisse out into the night, but the fact is her distraction of M. Goudeau gave Swann the time he needed to hide the evidence of his crime, then return to the house and make a seemingly innocent exit a few minutes later. As for the note I just destroyed, there is no reason to assume it was anything but genuine. I burned it to protect my family's honor, and to prevent my sister's name from being dragged, explicitly, into Swann's sordid machinations."

Clarisse was paying no attention to her brother's pronouncements. Instead, she was poking among the items scattered on the floor. At last she bent down and picked something up. It was a folded piece of paper, robin's egg blue, which she handed to Aichele.

"This," she said, "is the note I received the night of my

mother's death. The envelope which once contained it, and which my brother just burned, was the same color. Only the person who wrote the note could have known which envelope, among the many you see here, was the one supposedly given to me by M. Swann that night. As for its authenticity, the handwriting is a crude mimicking of M. Swann's. I made the comparison myself several days ago with his letters to my mother, but ignored the obvious implications. I suspect that a comparison with my brother's handwriting will prove more fruitful."

"And where was Jean Luc when you needed him?" said Aichele to Richard, who stood in the middle of the room, the blackened scraps of paper still smoldering near his feet. "Dead, by your own hand. It seems one can be too thorough, can't one?"

By the middle of the following week, the weather in Paris had moderated considerably. The vacationers returned, and the city was again its amused and busy self.

Aichele was in his study, having just returned from the newsstand with his copy of the *Gazette*. Mrs. Poll was dusting near the bookcases, as she did every Wednesday.

"Well, look here, Mrs. Poll," said Aichele. "It seems they've wrung a confession from Richard Fontaine. And there is even some mention of us—quoting Inspector Leroux—'attention was initially drawn to M. Fontaine by information provided by private citizens.'"

"That's right generous of the inspector," said Mrs. Poll, the sudden intensity of her dusting complementing the sarcastic tone of her voice. There was a knock at the door just then, and a few moments later Mrs. Poll showed Sergeant Dulac into the study. He was wearing the uniform of a common street patrolman, and one look told Aichele what had happened.

"How nice to see you, sergeant, or should I say Patrolman Dulac. It looks like you've been aptly rewarded for your work on the Fontaine case."

Dulac smiled uncomfortably. "I'm afraid so, inspector. I was congratulated on my diligence and then, in the same breath, informed that certain personality problems had arisen and there was no longer a place for me on Inspector Leroux's staff." He pointed to the *Gazette* on the desk. "And I see the inspector is being his usual modest self, never mentioning Swann and the fact that he might have been executed for a crime he did not commit."

"But I'm sure that's just how Swann wants it," said Aichele.

"You never thought for a moment he was the killer?"

"Let's just say I was severely tempted to assume his innocence, though I would like to believe I came to the Préfecture that morning prepared to evaluate impartially the evidence against him. You see, I was responding to a challenge to my powers of objective observation, the very powers whose deterioration I fear most in my 'retirement.' Fortunately, one look at the smoking jacket simultaneously confirmed the continued existence of my abilities and the very assumption of innocence I had been encouraged to make."

"But the jacket was the one piece of tangible evidence which directly implicated Swann."

"Apparently. When Richard spattered Henri's blood across it, he did take care to arrange the sash in exactly the position it would occupy were it pulled securely around the jacket. Consequently, there were bloodstains on the sash but none on the material it covered. But he forgot that the jacket was double-breasted. If it had actually been worn during the stabbing one side would have overlapped the other and shielded it from the spattering blood. As you know, both sides

of the jacket bore copious bloodstains, which meant neither Swann nor anyone else was wearing it when the staining occurred.

"The jacket, then, was a contrived bit of evidence. But knowing that only meant I had gained entrance to the whole contrived structure which was the case against Swann. It seemed I could explore that structure to my heart's content without ever bringing it down. Showing that the will was a forgery only made Swann appear more guilty, as you pointed out. The connection to M. Luc was pertinent but circumstantial, as any competent prosecutor would have demonstrated, in addition to presenting a more incriminating explanation for the pattern of bloodstains. The only recourse was to bring pressure to bear on the structure itself, and to try to use its own perfection against it. When all the elements fit together so perfectly, then the most insignificant seeming ones must be defended as vigorously as the major parts, because if one fails, the whole fails."

"So it was a matter of hounding Richard into making a mistake?"

"That's one way of seeing it, but remember Clarisse had just as much to gain as Richard. It became a matter of building a

rival structure, one which would, by comparison, show the flaws in the killer's structure. It was then incumbent upon the guilty one of the two suspects to defend and maintain the false structure, a task which, as we saw, eventually proved too much for Richard."

"Plus the fatal mistake of not destroying the note to Clarisse earlier, which would have been simple to do, since he had access to the whole house," added Dulac.

"That was indeed a mistake, but he had already committed a much more fundamental error. He completely underestimated his sister. I think he knew she would eventually suspect him, so he left Henri there for her to find not only as part of the night's scheme, but as a warning for Clarisse to keep whatever suspicions she might

have to herself. He thought he could silence her by preying upon her vanity and fear, and he failed, though I have to admit her seemingly excessive concern over Henri was mystifying to me until she told the full story."

"And Swann's friends?" said Dulac. "They must be quite satisfied with your work, and I suppose now you will become the star of their soirées."

"I think not. I enjoy my life just the way it is, quiet and frugal. And speaking of the pecuniary, I have something here for each of you, a measure of my appreciation."

Aichele handed Dulac and Mrs. Poll each an envelope, the colors of the franc notes inside showing through the thin paper in the morning light, which streamed in from the study window.

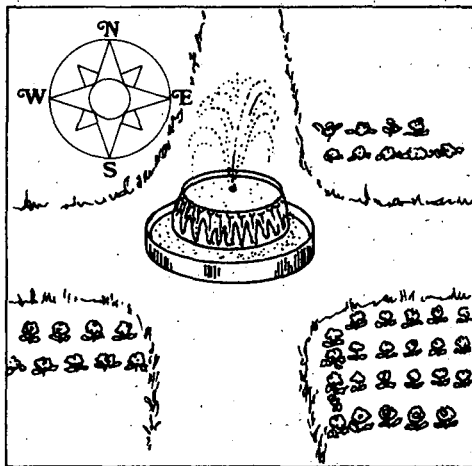
UNSOLVED

by
Diane C. Baldwin

Unsolved at present, that is, but can you work it out?

The answer will appear in the March issue.

Agent 002 was gathering information from Carmen and three other ladies and arranged to meet each one separately at the fountain in the park, one at the stroke of each hour from 9:00 P.M. to midnight. So that he could recognize them quickly, he asked each to wear a different color dress (one was yellow). Since there were four paths leading to the fountain, from the north, south, east, and west, he had each lady use only one path, each different from that used by any of the others. From the following clues, can you tell when he met with each lady, what color each wore, and what path each took?



1. As Maria tiptoed toward the fountain, she could faintly see to her right the path a mysterious lady in green would take just an hour later.
2. The last lady on the scene was not dressed in red, nor did she steal into the park from east or west.

3. Tess and the lady in blue each arrived furtively an hour apart from opposite directions, as did two others who came an hour apart.
4. 002 saw his lady in blue, who did not take the west path, approach silently from the path which was to Enid's left, when she arrived an hour later.

"002's Rendezvous," reprinted from Dell Book of Logic Problems #2, © 1987 Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, Inc.

SOLUTION TO THE JANUARY "UNSOLVED":

(1) STRIKE WHILE THE IRON'S HOT

- (2) Step 1: $20'' \times 4' = 80''$ circumference
- Step 2: $\frac{80}{3.14} = 25.48$ diameter
- Step 3: $25.48 \times 25.48 = 649.23$ area of square
- Step 4: $\frac{25.48}{2} = 12.74$ radius of circle
- Step 5: $12.74 \times 12.74 \times 3.14 = 509.65$ area of circle
- Step 6: $\frac{509.65}{139.58} =$ area of corners
- Step 7: $\frac{139.58}{4} = 34.9$ square inches area of spider's web.

(3) Answer: \$5.25. Take the section with three links and the section with four links and have all seven links opened. These seven links can now be used to join the other seven sections together.

(4) It can be done in just four moves. Jump 5 over 8, 9, 3, 1. Jump 7 over 4. Jump 6 over 2, 7. Jump 5 over 6, which leaves the last checker in the middle.

(5) Answer: June 4, 1976, at 12:00 noon. For the three clocks to again show 12:00 at the same time it is necessary for the first clock to lose twelve hours and for the second clock to gain twelve hours. This will take exactly 720 days. Add this to June 15, 1974, and we get June 4, 1976 (1976 was a leap year).

FICTION

Mysterious Ways

by Richard F. McGonegal



Grandpa had style. His reputation for spectacular entrances and grand exits was well deserved. But perhaps the grandest exit he ever made was at his own funeral.

His second grandest exit had come only a few days earlier, when he drove his Barnes Construction Company truck off the Old Post Road, careened down a forty foot cliff, and departed from earthly life.

Grandpa's plunge rippled shock waves through the community, even if it wasn't wholly unexpected. His daughters—including my mom—and the few townsfolk who were his elders had lectured him

repeatedly about how his hard drinking and wild driving would be the death of him. But Grandpa, with customary aplomb, shrugged off their warnings.

The crowd which gathered at the Humansville Baptist Church to pay their final respects and to hear the Reverend William Robert Williford's eulogy was a testament to Grandpa's stature. I was only nine years old at the time, but the events remain vivid even now.

Grandma was there, of course, and Mom and Dad, and my mercenary Aunt Brigetta, whose profuse weeping was spawned by her knowledge that Grandpa had died on the verge of becoming wealthy. It was no secret in and around Humansville that Grandpa's company was the odds-on favorite to win the lucrative government contracts being sought locally for work at the U.S. air base under construction twenty miles south of town. All of Grandpa's employees were in attendance, including his construction foreman, Pete Myers, and his business manager, Jimmy George Lowe. They—along with my dad and the other three sons-in-law—had been selected to serve as pallbearers. Even Roy Crum, whom Grandpa hadn't spoken to for more than ten years, came to the funeral. There had been bad blood between them from the day Grandpa gave Roy the boot, and it escalated over the years as Roy's construction company grew larger and more competitive.

People from surrounding towns also turned out, packing the large sanctuary of the church Grandpa had rebuilt nearly two decades ago after a tornado demolished the original structure. The only people conspicuously absent were my Aunt Molly and Aunt Eleanor, who were back at my grandparents' house preparing the food and setting out plates, silverware, and cups for what I referred to as the "funeral party."

"We gather here today," Reverend Williford began, his booming voice echoing from the rafters and quieting the congregation, "to pay our respects to a man who will live forever in the history of our proud community."

He paused and waited for silence to settle. "For although Luther Leroy Barnes has ascended to the portals of heaven and has been welcomed to the peace and tranquility of life eternal by the Lord our God, he also remains forever with us. He remains in our thoughts, he remains in our memories, and," again Reverend Williford paused for effect, "he remains in our hearts."

The reverend surveyed the crowd with a solemn gaze and leaned forward in the pulpit. "What kind of man was Luther Barnes?" he asked, knitting his brows quizzically and warming to his own rhet-

oric. "He was a loving husband," he paused, "and father," he paused again, "and grandfather." I looked over and saw that Grandma and Mom were beginning to sob quietly, dabbing at their eyes with wrinkled tissues. Aunt Brigetta, who had gotten quite a head start, was now weeping convulsively.

"He was," Reverend Williford continued in dramatic fashion, "a good neighbor and a good friend. He was a man who could be taken at his word; a man of kindness, generosity, and honor.

"But he was more than that. Much more. My words are too poor to convey the richness of his deeds, but I will try to do justice to those deeds—deeds which speak so eloquently of the measure of this man." Reverend Williford made a measured sweep of his arm above the coffin before him.

"Not long after I received the call to return to this my hometown," and he extended his arms as if to embrace his audience, "and to shepherd this congregation, our house of worship was destroyed by a great natural force.

"And so it was that I went to Luther—a man I had known since I was a boy—and asked if he would help rebuild the church. And do you know what he said to me? He said, 'Jesus Christ, Billy Bob, I hope they taught you more in seminary school than how to reach into someone else's pockets.'"

I giggled, drawing a glare from Mom, but a quiet chuckle amongst the congregation saved me from further retribution.

"Coming from anyone else," Reverend Williford said with a smile that reached to his eyes, "those words would be blasphemy. But coming from Luther Barnes, they meant, 'I would be honored to help rebuild the house of the Lord.'"

I squirmed around on the wooden bench, looked back at Randy and Ricky Crutchfield, and saw that they were becoming as impatient as I was. We were looking forward to the funeral party, the rare opportunity to have soda and cake and, afterward, to play hide-and-seek, or red light, green light. A slap on my hands from Mom brought me around.

"And so he did," Reverend Williford said with quiet compassion, "and so he did. This house of worship where we have gathered together these past nineteen years, and where we gather today, was built with his hands, with the sweat from his brow, and, yes, with the money from his pocket.

"Not a single dime," the reverend said, his voice rising anew, "not one thin dime would he accept from the coffers.

"And when we were finished..." He paused. "... When we

were through, we stood together and looked at this glorious new edifice, this magnificent new home for the Lord our God, and Luther Barnes said to me, 'Jesus Christ, Billy Bob, if I'da known it was gonna come out this nice, I'da built it for myself.'

"And I said to him, 'If I couldn't see the love in your heart for the Lord, I'd step away to avoid being burned by the bolt of lightning that would most certainly strike you down.'

"That was the kind of man Luther Barnes was—a man who could not be measured by his words, nor by mine, but only by his deeds. For his love of God, and of his fellow man, ran so deep, that it was not easily seen on the surface. But to those of us who knew him, his love was as visible as the stars on a cloudless night, as visible as our fertile fields in the summer sunlight, as visible as the guiding hand of the Lord our God in our daily lives."

I twisted around again on the bench and watched Randy and Ricky Crutchfield surreptitiously elbowing each other until all three of us received respective slaps from our moms.

Despite our signals of impatience, Reverend Williford was not about to abbreviate his eulogy, not by a long shot. He talked some more about Grandpa, painting a colorful but accurate portrait, warts and all. After bringing all the women in the congregation to tears, he embarked on what Grandpa always called "a long-winded fire and brimstone finale that would scare the bejesus out of Gabriel."

I was getting my hands slapped for the fourth time, for fidgeting, when the pallbearers finally stood and lifted Grandpa's coffin. Led by Reverend Williford, the procession adjourned from the sanctuary and proceeded across the road to the parish cemetery.

It was a warm, muddy March day, and the recent snowmelt which saturated the ground had permeated my newly polished shoes. The sky was so dark and low it seemed to lie on my shoulders like a wet sack of grain, and the wind swirled and ripped at my jacket and tousled my hair. Reverend Williford took his place at the head of the coffin and began reading, raising his voice progressively louder against the competition from the wind, which was rattling tree branches and howling to be heard.

"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want," he read, pinching the pages of his Bible.

The sky seemed to be undulating overhead, pressing its greenish-gray weight lower and lower.

"He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside still waters."

The wind whipped itself into a frenzy, like a runaway freight train rampaging through the fields.

"He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of . . ."

"Tornado," yelled someone behind me.

We all turned, almost in unison, and saw the twister churning up trees and shrubs and spitting out splintered fragments as it carved a vicious path toward the cemetery. The group scattered. In an instant Dad swept me up in his arms and, along with Mom and Grandma and most of the others, ran back to the church. I watched over his shoulder as the tornado gathered up a half dozen headstones, then snatched the coffin and carried Grandpa away.

It was minutes before most of the people realized what had happened. Fear lingered and, mixed with the newfound confusion as word spread that the coffin had been swiped, the congregation fell dumbstruck. Whispers became a drone, interrupted by shrieks and cries, until Reverend Williford called out in a loud, commanding voice: "Everybody, please, please, back into the sanctuary."

The reverend conferred with my grandma, my parents, and my aunts and uncles as the congregation slowly filed back inside the church. Sheriff Glover, who had been talking frantically on the radio in his patrol car, approached and conversed in whispers with Reverend Williford for a few minutes before we too returned to our seats in the sanctuary.

As soon as everyone was settled, the sheriff informed the group that he had been in contact with headquarters in Humansville and no other tornado sightings or damage reports had been received. He added that he and his deputies would begin a search immediately for what he called "the property in question."

As the sheriff hurried from the building, Reverend Williford slowly ascended to the pulpit and led the congregation in a prayer "for divine guidance from the Lord our God."

Silence reigned in the sanctuary for what seemed like minutes after the prayer ended before Reverend Williford spoke again. "Perhaps the only shock greater than the tragic accident that ended Luther Barnes's life on earth is the abrupt manner in which his body just now was plucked by natural forces as it was about to be interred in its resting place."

He paused and stared at the group, obviously gathering his thoughts. "But we must remember that although his body has been taken, his soul has already ascended to join the legions of true believers in the halls of heaven. We must remember, too, that the Lord does indeed move in mysterious ways. I believe, and I know

you share this belief, that God, who moves the forces of nature, is responsible for this event. We must trust in the Lord our God." He paused. "We must trust that what has happened is as it should be."

Buoyed by Reverend Williford's encouraging words, we repaired to the funeral party—a party Randy and Ricky Crutchfield and I all agreed was unlike any we'd ever attended. Condolences were uttered with awkward smiles and conversations were punctuated by long pauses. The people moved about and offered handshakes and kisses with a mannequin-like stiffness, then circled the food table with uncomfortable reticence.

After treating ourselves to two helpings of soda and cake, Randy and Ricky Crutchfield and I went outside to play, but not before I received a stern admonition from Grandma to stay off the porch roof, my favorite place for hide-and-seek. "Your grandpa was fixing the supports before he died, and I don't know how safe it is," she said. Luckily, Randy and Ricky hadn't heard her give away my secret spot.

Once outdoors, Randy and I quickly agreed that Ricky, the youngest, would be "it" first, and while he covered his eyes and began counting, we scattered. Randy headed for the shrubs near the garage, and I shinnied up the large oak tree beside the back porch. Despite my temptation to slide onto the porch roof and lie down completely out of sight until Ricky strayed far from "home," I heeded Grandma's warning. I nestled into the wide crook of branches at roof level and drew my knees up to my chin. Even though the storm had passed and the sky had cleared, I knew I would be hard to spot in the rapidly approaching twilight.

"Ninety-eight, ninety-nine, a hunnerd, ready or not, here I come," Ricky called out as he darted away to search for us. As I craned my neck in an attempt to see where he had gone, I heard the screen door to the back porch fall shut, followed by the sound of footsteps and a dull squeak as the porch swing settled.

"It's creepy, Roy," said a voice I recognized. It belonged to Grandpa's business manager, Jimmy George Lowe. "I mean I helped carry his coffin."

"Don't go gettin' weird on me," said a second voice, which I guessed to be Roy Crum. "That's the only reason I came out here."

"What d'ya mean?" Jimmy George asked, his voice unsteady.

"I was afraid you might start gettin' weird on me," Roy said. "Just remember. You and I are in this together."

"How d'ya figure?" Jimmy George said, sounding more frightened. "I didn't do nothin'."

"You did plenty," Roy said adamantly. "You agreed to inflate the Barnes bid for my promisin' you fifteen percent once I got the contracts. That's conspiracy, buddy boy."

"Yeah, okay. But it ain't murder. I didn't tamper with the brakes."

"Shut your mouth. Are you crazy?" Roy said. He sounded both angry and fearful. "Listen, buddy boy. You were the one who told me when he'd be travelin' the Old Post Road, and that's conspiracy, too. Conspiracy to commit murder."

"But I didn't know you . . ."

"Didn't know what?" Roy interrupted. "You think for a minute he wouldn't have found out about the bid? It had to be done. But lemme tell you somethin'. If I fall, I'm takin' you with me, and there ain't no jury nowhere that's gonna think you didn't know what was goin' on."

"But I didn't . . . I mean . . . I don't know," Jimmy George whimpered. I could hear him sobbing quietly.

"Shut up and get yourself together," Roy said. "You hear. You fall apart and we lose everything. You'll get no money, you'll go to prison, maybe even the gas chamber. You want that?"

"I'da been . . . I'da been all right," Jimmy George stammered, "once they'd put him in the ground."

"He's dead, dammit," Roy said. "He's dead and he can't hurt us. Everybody thinks it was an accident. Nobody's investigating. We're home free unless you start to . . ."

Crack.

The voices stopped.

Crack.

I looked up and saw the coffin balanced precariously on two branches directly above the porch roof, its dark shape silhouetted against the deep blue of the early-evening sky.

Crack.

Down it came, branches and all, smashing onto the roof. The supports collapsed inwards like broken twigs and the whole works—roof, branches, coffin—fell with a sudden deadly scream.

Once again, Grandpa had made a spectacular entrance.

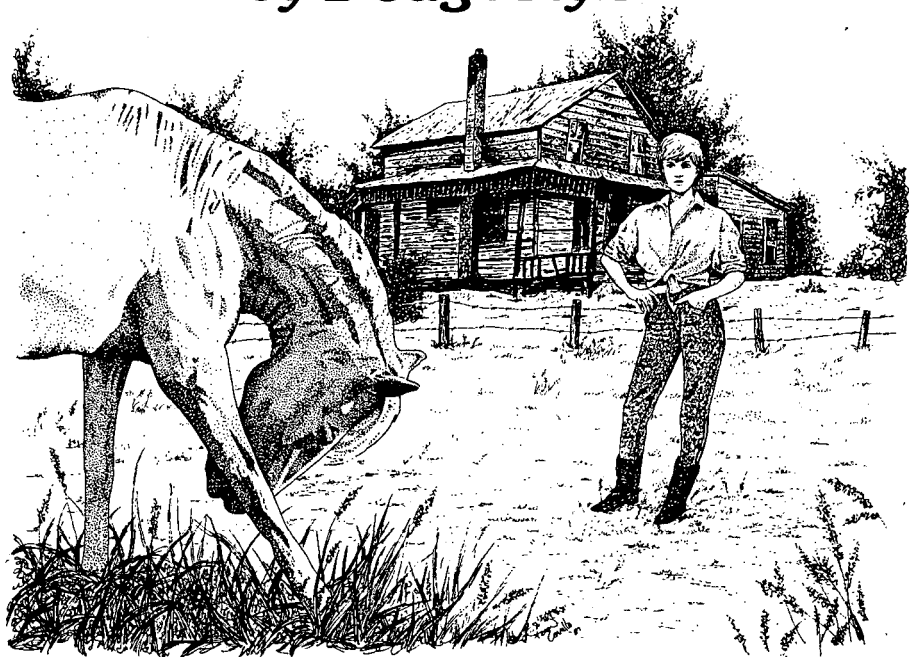
We all gathered the next day to bury him, and we gathered two days after that to bury Jimmy George and Roy.

And Randy and Ricky and I had soda and cake three times in the space of one week. Mysterious ways, indeed.

FICTION

Bloodlines

by Doug Allyn



Quintero began slowing the patrol car as soon as he spotted the Porsche parked on the shoulder of the narrow dirt road. Ordinarily he hated to ask a civilian for directions, but the woman leaning against the silver roadster was the first person he'd seen in twenty miles, and he was tired of blundering around the boondocks. Being

lost had been okay for a while. It was one of those rare, golden, Northern California mornings. *El sol* was beaming down between the redwoods and Douglas firs of the Rainbow Ridge foothills, and the air was rich and sweet enough to sip. He was sure he'd recognize a road-sign or a landmark eventually, but no such luck. The back roads seemed to run on forever,

and now he was running late. Like it or not, it was time to ask for some help. He just hoped Ms. Porsche had a sense of humor.

She straightened as the patrol car approached, and the morning sunlight caught her hair. It was an odd shade of reddish-blond, worn tomboy short, and it was the only boyish thing about her. She was tall, and slender, wearing designer sunglasses, an unbleached-muslin blouse, fashionably faded jeans, and western boots. And he decided he might've asked her for directions even if he hadn't been lost.

He eased the prowl car to a halt next to the Porsche. The woman opened the passenger door and slid in beside him.

"Take the first road to the right," she said.

"I beg your pardon?"

"The first road to the right," she repeated, "Glaser Road."

"Ma'am, if you've got car trouble I'll be glad to call for assistance, but I'm a cop, not a cabbie."

She lifted her sunglasses for a moment, glanced at him, then lowered them again. He got a fleeting impression of sea green eyes, cool and deep.

"I asked Chief Hanna to send an officer out here half an hour ago," she said. "Aren't you him?"

"Oh," Quintero said, "yeah,

I guess I am. When Charlie told me to meet somebody from Animal Control I wasn't expecting—"

"A woman?"

"A Porsche," he said, gunning the patrol car into motion. "Most dogcatchers drive trucks."

"I'm not a dog warden," she said, "I'm an Animal Control Officer, Commercial Division, and you're late."

"I got lost," he said, "and I'm sorry if—"

"Turn right," she said.

He took the corner a bit faster than necessary. She didn't seem to notice.

"Pull into that driveway just beyond the rusty mailbox," she said. "The house and barn are about a hundred yards back—what are you doing?"

"Stopping," Quintero said, braking the prowl car to a halt in the middle of the country road. "Before I pull into anybody's anything I want to know exactly what's going on. And by the way, I'm Sergeant Raymond Quintero. Ray." He offered her his hand. She accepted it reluctantly.

"Carolyn Wakeford," she said. "You're new, aren't you?"

"I've been up here on the Redwood County force about three months," Quintero said. "Before that, Los Angeles, where I didn't bust a lot of commercial animals, whatever they are."

"Horses, cattle, and hogs," Carolyn said, "in this case, horses, neglect or abuse. We had a complaint from a tourist. I drove out and made a visual check, and then got a warrant. We can now legally enter the property, and examine the animals in question. If I determine criminal abuse or neglect is involved, you arrest the owner and the county seizes the animals. At the—"

"Ms. Wakeford," Quintero interrupted gently, "you can skip the lecture on the law. I know the law. I just didn't recognize the term 'commercial animal.' In L.A. they're called—something else."

"Really? Like what?"

"Nothing I'd care to repeat in the presence of a lady," he said.

"Spare me the flattery, sergeant, if that's what it was. I step in enough of it around the stockyards."

"No flattery intended, ma'am," Quintero sighed, "just giving you the benefit of the doubt."

The farm definitely didn't qualify as picture postcard material. The front porch leaned drunkenly against the peeling white clapboard house, and the weatherbeaten barn looked as if it'd barely survived the earthquake of '06. Quintero threaded the prowl car through a maze

of rusting farm machinery and parked in the yard. The cattle staring at him over the fence looked muddy and bored and not very bright, like every other cow he'd ever seen, but they appeared healthy enough. The horses were another matter.

There were two of them in the steel-stake barbed-wire corral at one end of the sagging barn. Rough-coated, swaybacked, heads drooping, they looked like deathcamp survivors. Quintero opened his door, then instantly shut it again as a black lightning bolt of a Doberman exploded from beneath the front porch and hurled himself at the prowl car, snarling, his foam-flecked jaws gnashing frantically at the window only inches from Quintero's face. Ray calmly unclipped the can of Mace from the dashboard, rolled down the window just far enough to give the Doberman a spritz, then quickly rolled it back up. Carolyn Wakeford was staring at him in open appraisal. "It'll take a minute to work," he said. "Dobes are a pretty high-strung breed."

"So they are," she agreed. "Are you an animal lover, sergeant?"

"Just dogs," Quintero said absently, "there are lots of 'em in L.A., Dobes, rottweilers, Danes. Pit bulls are the worst. Sometimes even Mace won't

cool 'em out. Somebody's watching us from the house."

"Are you sure?"

"Yep. Standing just inside the screen door. Who owns this dump?"

"The name on the lease is Slater," Carolyn said, "Brodie Slater."

Quintero eased out of the patrol car, Mace can at the ready. The Doberman stood his ground a moment, growling, eyes streaming, then slunk back under the porch. The screen door opened and a thin, rawboned woman stepped out. She was barefoot, wearing torn jeans and a faded army surplus T-shirt. She looked a tired thirty, with worn, narrow features and empty eyes. Her hair was mousy brown, tied back in a long pony tail.

"Mrs. Slater?"

"Brodie ain't here," she said, "you'll have to come back. You shoulda called first."

"Ah, actually we're here about the horses," Quintero said.

"The horses?" she frowned, puzzled. "What about 'em?"

"Maybe nothing," he said, "we just need to look them over if you don't mind."

"Whatever," she shrugged, "can't do 'em much harm. Brodie'll be back in a couple of minutes. Suit yourselves." She turned and walked back into the house and softly closed the

door. And locked it. Quintero glanced back over his shoulder at her as he walked to the barn. She was still standing there, watching them from the shadows.

Carolyn was in the corral with the two horses. She'd already hooked a lead rope on the mare's halter and tied it to the rusty barbed wire fence, but the second animal, a stallion, was giving her trouble. He snorted and reared, lashing out at her with a foreleg. She avoided it with a deft hip-swivel, grabbed his halter and pulled his head down. And then she talked to him, murmuring softly in his ear, her small blonde head pressed close against his great dark one. And watching her, Quintero felt his breathing go suddenly shallow. She was an attractive woman of course; still, the surge of emotion took him by surprise. There was something special about her . . . and something vaguely familiar, too, as though he'd seen her before somewhere.

Whatever Carolyn whispered to the stallion seemed to work. He gentled down and followed her docilely to the fence where she tied him beside the mare. He stood there, head down, huffing, his shoulders lathered from the brief show of spirit. Carolyn walked slowly around both animals, frowning, occa-

sionally running her hands over patchy areas in their coats.

"What do you think?" Quintero asked.

"I think they're dying," she said curtly. She slid her thumb under the mare's upper lip and lifted it. "Look at her gums, pale, almost bloodless, and the whites of her eyes are the same. Advanced equine anemia due to intestinal parasites, they—"

She broke off, interrupted by the rumble of the dusty gray late model pickup truck that roared into the yard, skidding to a halt just a few feet from the corral fence. A rangy cowboy-type clad in faded jeans and a sweat-stained denim shirt climbed out. His shoulder-length hair was a salt and pepper tangle, and his beard had a narrow, bone white streak that trickled from the corner of his mouth like a scar. He was dark as an Indian from working in the sun, slim as a railroad tie and looked just as hard.

"Mr. Slater?" Quintero said, moving to intercept him.

"That's right. What's going on?"

"We're looking into a complaint concerning these horses," Carolyn said. "Do you own them? And can you prove it?"

"Sure. I got a bill o' sale if you're wonderin'."

"Could we see it, please?"

"Jilly!" he shouted, still star-

ing at Carolyn. "Bring me that folder off my desk! The one with all the papers in it! Now, what's this about a complaint?"

"Your horses are in poor condition," Carolyn said. "Has a veterinarian examined them recently?"

"Nah. I had one come out a while back for a cow, but I didn't own the horses then. Just picked 'em up a couple months ago."

"They didn't get into this condition in a couple of months," Carolyn said evenly.

"They was in pretty bad shape when I bought 'em," Slater conceded. "They're supposed to have good bloodlines, though, registered thoroughbreds. Figured maybe I could bring 'em around, sell the colts." His wife handed him a manila folder, then turned without a word and shuffled back toward the house.

Slater riffled quickly through the papers and extracted a small bill and a larger vellum sheet. "There's the bill of sale for 'em, and that there's their registration. Satisfied?"

Carolyn glanced at them and handed them back. "Mr. Slater, do you ever touch your horses?"

"Whaddya mean, touch 'em?"

"Have you ever stroked them, or laid your hands on them, like this?" Carolyn held her palm against the mottled cheekbone of the stallion for a moment,

then removed it. The area she'd touched seemed to shimmer, then come alive. It was crawling with lice.

"Yeah," Slater admitted, "I know they got them bugs. I sprayed 'em down with Raid but it didn't seem to help."

"You sprayed them with—? Mr. Slater, any vet could have cured these animals with antibiotics if they'd been examined in time. Spraying them with insecticide only made them more miserable than they were already and probably poisoned them when they licked it off. Do you own any other horses?"

"No, just these two."

"Thank God for that, at least. Mr. Slater, I'm going to issue you a citation for neglect. Officer Quintero, would you please read the gentleman his rights."

"Hey, wait a minute," Slater said, "you mean you're arrestin' me?"

"I'm afraid so," Quintero said. "It's only a misdemeanor. You get an immediate hearing and the worst you can get is a fine."

"Over a goddam horse I been bustin' my butt to feed? Hell, I tried to get a vet to come and look at 'em. He never showed up."

"Really?" Carolyn said skeptically, "what was the vet's name?"

"I—can't think of his name offhand, but—hey, you're makin'

a big mistake here. At least gimme a chance to straighten it out."

"You can present your side of it at the hearing," Quintero said. "Either way you'll be home in a couple of hours. Let's go."

"Ahhh, crap!" Slater said, "lemme get my coat and tell my ol' lady what's haps. Jilly!"

Quintero followed him to the porch where Slater explained the situation bitterly to his wife, gave her instructions about feeding the stock, and grabbed a jacket. There was a groan from the corral as the stallion collapsed to its knees. "Damn it," Slater said softly, his face clouding. He stalked back to the corral where Carolyn was kneeling beside the fallen horse. "I remember that vet's name now," Slater said angrily. "It was Smalley."

"It doesn't make much difference now, does it," she said, rising. "I doubt that this animal will survive the night."

"Lemme get this straight," Slater said, "you're havin' me arrested because you think I mistreated these horses, right?"

"Perhaps you didn't mistreat them deliberately," she said evenly, "I'm not citing you for abuse. But to be blunt, Mr. Slater, you obviously don't know a damn thing about horses and people like you have no business owning them."

"Maybe you're right, lady," Slater said, "maybe I don't. But there's more'n one way to fix that." He stalked over to his pickup, reached through the open window, and came out with a .45 automatic.

"Hey!" Quintero said, clashing for his own weapon.

Slater cocked his .45 as he stepped quickly up to the mare. He placed the muzzle of the gun against her skull and fired. She reared, screaming, pawing at the sky, spraying the air with bright, arterial blood, tearing the corral post out of the ground as she fell. The stallion shied, struggling to get to its feet. Slater turned and fired two more shots point blank into its head. It groaned and toppled slowly over on its side. He stood over it a moment, shaking his head slowly, his eyes moist, then he turned slowly to Carolyn.

"How about it, lady?" he said grimly, "you see any more animals around here you don't like?"

"Put the gun down," Quintero said. "Now."

Slater glanced at him and their eyes met and held for a moment. Carolyn was between them, and both men knew Quintero couldn't risk a shot. For a moment the only sound was the mare pawing weakly in the corral, and then a last, vast sigh as she died. Slater

shrugged, and eased the hammer down on his weapon. He placed it on the ground and stepped away from it.

"I got a permit for the gun and I'm on my own land," he said coldly, "and unless you got any other business here I want you off my property."

"You son of a bitch!" Carolyn slapped Slater hard across the face, snapping his head around.

Slater glared down at her, hard-eyed, enraged. A thin rivulet of blood trickled from his nose and he wiped it away with the back of his hand. "I asked ya to let me straighten things out," he said, his voice shaking, "but you were in too big a hurry. Now I'm tellin' ya to get. And you'd better not try to hit me again, lady."

Quintero picked up Slater's weapon, then took Carolyn by the arm. "Come on," he said, "we're leaving."

"What? Aren't you going to arrest him?"

"There's no law against destroying a diseased animal," Quintero said, walking her firmly to the car, "but there are laws against giving citizens bloody noses. Besides, I can't see his wife and I'm not sure either one of 'em is playin' with a full deck." He pushed her into the prowl car, slammed the door, and turned back to Slater. "If your permit checks out, you'll

get your weapon back."

"It'll check out," Slater said, "and the vet's name was Smalley. Don't forget to check him out, too."

"I won't forget any of this," Quintero said, "count on it."

Quintero radioed in an LEIN request on Slater as he pulled out of the driveway, and got the return call before he reached Carolyn's convertible. There were no wants, warrants, or priors on Brodie Slater, and he had a valid state permit to carry a concealed weapon.

"Which means what?" Carolyn asked as they pulled up beside her car. "You're not going to do anything?"

"Legally there's really nothing we can do," Quintero said. "Slater was within his rights to destroy the animals, and it's not as though he got off scot-free. Hauling the carcasses away will cost him more than the fine would have, and he'll have to tear down part of his corral to get them out. Look, I know it upset you—"

"Don't patronize me, Quintero!" she snapped. "I've seen animals destroyed before, I've even done it myself when it was necessary, but—"

"But people like Slater shouldn't own horses, right? Well, he doesn't own any now, does he?"

"Maybe he doesn't," she countered angrily, "but that's not the end of it. He's not going to get away with this." She slid out of the prowler car and slammed the door. She climbed into her Porsche, fired it up, and sprayed Quintero's cruiser with a hail of gravel as she roared off.

He shook his head slowly as the silver convertible disappeared over the next hill in a cloud of dust. And somehow he was still seeing her, standing in that ramshackle corral, whispering to the stallion, with the morning sunlight shining in her hair.

"Dammit," he said softly, "dammit, dammit, dammit."

Quintero got the return-to-station call at four thirty, just before his shift ended. He guessed what it was about, and he was right. Charlie Hanna was waiting for him in his office, his ungainly six and a half foot frame folded comfortably into his throne-backed chair, fingers laced behind his head, an unlit De Nobili cigar clamped in the corner of his mouth. Hanna had been a Marine officer for twenty years, and a cop for twenty more, and every day of it showed in his gaunt, acne-scarred face and wary eyes. He seemed less dour than usual, though, per-

haps because he had company. Carolyn Wakeford was standing beside the window, staring out at the parking lot. She turned when Quintero entered, and their eyes met. He did his best not to stare, but didn't quite manage it.

"Sergeant Quintero," Hanna said formally, "the district attorney, Mr. Sinclair here, tells me you had some trouble this morning."

Quintero snapped back to reality. He'd walked right past the man without seeing him, and Keith Sinclair was hard to miss. The Redwood County D.A. was impeccably dressed as usual, in a muted gray pin-striped suit, silk shirt, and rep-striped tie. He was a small man, with thinning sandy hair and an easy smile, a cherub in gold-rimmed glasses who barely looked old enough to be president of a high school student council. But he was as good in the courtroom as anyone Quintero had ever seen. "I ah, don't know that I'd call it trouble," Quintero said carefully. "There was—an incident."

"You don't call it trouble when a suspect recklessly endangers the lives of two county officers?" Sinclair said.

"What Slater did was pretty brutal, all right," Quintero admitted, "but there was nothing reckless about it. We were never

actually in danger. He made no overt threats, nothing like that."

"Ms. Wakeford said he had a gun in his truck," Charlie Hanna said.

"That's correct, but he's got a valid state permit to carry it," Quintero said. "I ran him through LEIN and he came out clean, and the state police would've checked his fingerprints before they issued a concealed weapon permit. They're pretty cautious about who gets them."

"Apparently they're not cautious enough," Sinclair said. "I want Slater brought in for questioning, assuming he hasn't skipped the county by now."

"He was still there a half an hour ago," Quintero said, "when I returned his gun."

"You did what?" Sinclair said, incredulous.

"I returned his weapon," Quintero said. "Look, the only charge against the guy was neglecting a horse, and that one would've fallen through. He told us he'd asked a vet to look at his horses and it was true. I checked it out. Dr. Smalley had a record of his calls, a couple of 'em in fact. Said he was reluctant to go out there because Slater doesn't know squat about livestock and was a slow pay. Slater may not be anybody's choice for rancher of the year, but he hasn't broken any laws.

I had no legal right to hold the weapon, and there's certainly no cause to haul him in for questioning."

"I'll make that judgment if you don't mind," Sinclair said. "No backwoods redneck is going to wave guns around my — around any county employee and—"

"So that's what this is about," Quintero said, glancing sharply at Carolyn Wakeford, then back at Sinclair, "I thought she looked—she's your sister, isn't she?"

"That's irrelevant," Sinclair said. "Slater—"

"Had two sick horses this morning," Quintero interrupted, "and now he's got a couple of carcasses in his front yard, a torn up corral, and that's enough hassle for anybody. The guy didn't break any laws and you know it. You're just bent outta shape because your sister—"

"*All right, cool it!* Both of you!" Hanna roared. "Keith, why don't you and Carolyn wait in the press room. Have a Coke and cool off. I want to talk to Quintero alone."

"That's—probably a good idea," Sinclair said, swallowing. "You might consider a week's suspension for insubordination."

"I'll think about it," Hanna said calmly, "but he doesn't

work for you, Keith, he works for me, so if you don't mind...?"

Sinclair shrugged and opened the door for Carolyn. She glanced at Quintero as she passed, her expression neutral, unreadable.

"Nice work," Hanna said, tossing his cigar in the general direction of the wastebasket. "You're on the force less than ninety days and you've already ticked off the D.A., who also happens to be number one son in one of the wealthiest clans in the county—"

"He's out of line on this one, Charlie," Quintero said.

"Maybe so," Hanna conceded, "but he's still a Sinclair, with an uncle who's a judge, two cousins on the city council—"

"Look, spare me the lecture on the guy's pedigree, Hanna. Are you going to suspend me or not? Because if you are, I'll help you score some extra points with Mr. Social Register out there. You can have my resignation right now. You're a good cop, Charlie, but if you're willing to roust some poor slob just to pacify a local blueblood with family connections, I won't work for you. It's bad policework, and I don't do bad policework. So what's it gonna be?"

Hanna stared at him a moment, then shook his head. "Any chance the guy's got anything

going out there? Growin' a little weed maybe?"

"Not likely. The place is pretty small and his cattle are scattered all over it. And finding a prowler car in his front yard didn't seem to faze him any."

"And he didn't offer any resistance? Or threaten you two in any way?"

"No," Quintero said, "and he could have. When he killed the horses he had me cold. His weapon was out and Ms. Wakeford was in the way. It would have been easy for him to play some head games with us, but he didn't."

"And you feel—grateful to him for that?"

"Maybe. Maybe I do. At least enough that I don't want to see Sinclair jerk him around just for laughs."

"All right, then," Hanna sighed, "it's your call, Ray. I'll pacify our illustrious prosecutor, but do me one favor, okay? Hit the locker room and take an extra long shower. I don't want you getting into it with Sinclair again. Fair enough?"

"Sure," Quintero nodded, "whatever you say, Charlie."

Quintero took a long, cool shower, exchanged his uniform for jeans, loafers, and a UCLA sportshirt, and still didn't avoid the Sinclairs, or at least not all of them. Carolyn

Wakeford was waiting in the department parking lot when he came out, leaning against her Porsche, arms folded, foot tapping impatiently. He hesitated, trying vainly to come up with something witty.

"Hi," he said.

"I want to apologize," Carolyn said without preamble, "I wanted something done about Slater, but it wasn't my intention to get you in trouble. Are you in trouble?"

"Nothing I can't handle."

"Well, if you need any help, just ask. I think I owe you one."

"For what?"

"You took a lot of heat in there. You could have deflected most of it by telling them that I slapped him and you had to drag me off."

"Maybe," Quintero shrugged, "it never occurred to me."

"Somehow I doubt that," she said. "Tell me something, do you know Slater? Is he a friend of yours?"

"No, I never saw him before this morning."

"Then why did you defend him in there?"

"I—don't know," he said slowly, "I suppose because what he did wasn't against the law. It may not have been pretty, but it wasn't illegal."

"Even so, I saw your face afterwards and you were as angry as I was. So what would be so wrong in bringing him in

for—questioning or something? Even if it isn't strictly legal, you said you worked in L.A. Didn't you ever bend the rules a little?"

"Sure I did," he said, "every day. But that was different. If we occasionally chucked the rule book down there, we did it just to survive. That's not the problem here."

"No? And what is the problem here?"

"I don't know, maybe it's—what did Slater say about his horses? Good bloodlines? Maybe that's what bothers me."

"Bloodlines? I don't understand."

"This morning you said, 'People like you shouldn't own horses,' like it was a privilege reserved for folks with proper breeding."

"That isn't how I meant it."

"Maybe not, but when he ticks you off, you can call up your brother the prosecutor, and maybe your uncle the judge, and rain all over the guy. And that bothers me. When some people can manipulate the law because they've got bucks, it doesn't make much difference whether they made it hustling crack or whackin' down the redwoods. The game's the same."

"And you think I'm — persecuting Slater because he's my social inferior or something? That's nonsense."

"It's easy enough to settle."

Quintero said. "I'm from East L.A."

"So?"

"So I'm technically your social inferior, too. So let's do dinner."

"I beg your pardon?"

"Look, I ah, couldn't help noticing you're not wearing rings, so I assume you're single. So if you don't have anything heavy on for tonight, a quick way to prove you're not a snob would be to share a meal with a bonafide member of a lower social stratum. Like me, for instance. Whaddya think? I promise not to talk with my mouth full."

She stared at him a moment, then shook her head slowly. "I'm not a snob, Quintero, but I'm not an airhead either. That's a very crude ploy."

"You're right," he sighed. "Sorry. It was the best I could do on short notice. I ah, apologize for insulting your intelligence. It's been interesting meeting you, Ms. Wakeford. Too bad it wasn't under better circumstances. Have a nice day."

"Quintero," she called after him as he walked away, "I said it was a crude ploy. I didn't say no."

The conversation at dinner ranged wide, and they found that they agreed on almost nothing, not food, or films, or politics, and most definitely not on the mat-

ter of Brodie Slater. They lingered over dessert, debating the merits of movie stars as pols, disagreed, but decided to continue the discussion at lunch the next day.

On Saturday they went for a drive along the coast road to Petrolia, and argued about music, and friendship, and books, and generally had a terrific time. And on Sunday they drove up into the King Range to a small park with a view of the Pacific. And had the whole place to themselves. He barbecued hot dogs, while she lectured him on nitrites and empty calories. And they sat on a picnic table and watched the sun swell as it slid into the mist on the horizon, and sink without a whisper into the sea. And still they stayed. And on the road home they passed a country store. And stopped. And bought a tent, and a sleeping bag. And they didn't come back till Tuesday. And they both wondered if things were happening too quickly. But it didn't feel like it. It felt solid, and real, and right. Very, very right.

And then they came back to the world. Quintero had to pull a couple of double shifts and they didn't plan to see each other until the weekend. But on Friday, Charlie Hanna stopped him in the hallway and handed him an envelope with his name on it.

"What's this?"

"A warrant," Hanna said, "for Brodie Slater, for questioning, possible felony firearms violation."

"But I ran a LEIN check on him," Quintero said, "he's clean."

"Or the name he's using is. The D.A. got Slater's driver's license photo from Sacramento on Monday and faxed it to every department in the state. We finally got a call from a Chula Vista cop this morning tentatively identifying the picture as one Timothy Anthony Bogert, a member of an outlaw motorcycle gang and a two-time loser."

"Is Bogert wanted for anything now?"

"No, but if Slater is Bogert, he's an ex-con, which means that handgun permit of his must be a phony."

"But it can't be, the state police—"

"Occasionally make mistakes, and it doesn't matter anyway," Hanna said. "We've got a signed complaint by a witness who saw him with the weapon—"

"What witness?"

"Carolyn Wakeford. The D.A. thought you might be reluctant to sign a statement. In any case, the warrant's valid, and since you know Slater or Bogert or whoever he is by sight . . ."

"This is still a crock, Charlie. You know damn well that if the

lady involved wasn't Sinclair's sister he wouldn't've gone through all this hassle over a lousy phony I.D."

"Maybe not, but it's a moot point now. The guy may be a convicted felon in illegal possession of a firearm and it's our job to check it out. So, unless you have any objections to serving a lawful warrant, Sergeant Quintero . . . ?"

"No, sir," Quintero said evenly, "I guess not."

"Good." Hanna nodded. "Nowak and Schmidt are working Highway 36 if you need backup."

"No problem," Quintero said, "I'll handle it."

Slater's pickup was parked in the front yard when Quintero pulled in. There were no horses in the newly repaired corral, but otherwise the farm looked much as it had the week before. Noisier, though. The cattle were bellowing in the feedlot beside the barn, and Quintero could hear the tinny babble of a television talk show from somewhere in the farmhouse.

He took the can of Mace from its dashboard clip and eased warily out of the prowler car, scanning the yard for the Doberman. He was halfway to the front door when he spotted it, crouched in the shadows under the porch. He shifted the Mace can to his left hand and slid his nightstick out of its sheath. If

the dog caught him in the open . . .

But either it remembered him from his last visit or it was a heavy sleeper, because it didn't charge from its lair as he approached, or even growl. The only sound was the prattling of the T.V. and a faint, background buzz that Quintero didn't place immediately. He started up the steps and then paused. Maybe the dog was too smart to attack him again, but it should've growled. Or something.

He knelt beside the sagging front porch and peered into the darkness beneath it. The Doberman was lying on its side, teeth bared in a frozen rictus of a snarl, tongue lolling, eyes staring, blind to the army of flies swarming across its face and humming above its carcass. The dog had voided in its final agony and the sour stench of excrement hovered in the air, and blended with it, a faint scent of—bitter almonds. Cyanide. And then Quintero was up, sprinting up the steps, hammering on the front door.

"SLATER!" No answer. Only the bellowing cattle, and the banal babble of the T.V. from within. "SLATER!" He drew his service revolver and tried the door. Locked. He reared back and kicked it open, charged in and flattened himself against the wall beside the door, listen-

ing, sweating. Until the hard, metallic stench of curdling blood and the drone of the flies told him there was no more reason for caution. None at all.

Carolyn was pacing the hall outside Charlie Hanna's office when Quintero got back to the station. "Hi," she said uncertainly. "Look, I ah, want to explain about signing that complaint."

"Oh? Why? Did you want to withdraw it?"

"No," she said, flushing, "I still feel that what the man did was wrong, even if it wasn't illegal, and something should be done about it."

He stared at her blankly for a moment, then shrugged. "Something has been," he said.

Hanna's office door opened and Keith Sinclair stepped out. "Quintero? I thought I recognized—you're alone? Where's Slater?"

"Still at his farm," Quintero said curtly. "Excuse me, I have to talk to Charlie."

"Now, just a minute," Sinclair said, grabbing his arm as he brushed past, "I took a lot of guff from you last week—" He choked off in mid-sentence as Quintero grabbed him by the lapels, lifted him off his feet, and slammed him into the door-frame. He held him there, his

hands shaking, their faces only inches apart.

"Quintero!" Hanna roared, coming up out of his chair. "What the hell—Ray, let him go! Now!"

For a moment Quintero didn't respond, then he slowly eased Sinclair back to the floor. "I'm sorry," he said, straightening Sinclair's lapels. He led him gently into the office and closed the door behind them, leaving Carolyn in the hall. "They're ah, they're dead," he said, turning to Hanna. "Slater and his wife. Shotgunned, both of them, probably sometime last night. It was definitely a professional hit. They even killed his dog. Apparently the Chula Vista cops weren't the only ones who recognized his picture."

For a moment no one spoke. Sinclair swallowed, but didn't back off an inch.

"You called him Slater," he said, "but we had reason to believe his name was Bogert."

"It was Bogert once," Quintero said, "but not any more. It was legally changed. The gun permit was legal, too. The feds expunged his felony convictions as part of the deal."

"Oh my God," Charlie Hanna said softly, his gaunt face going suddenly gray.

"I don't understand," Sinclair said, "what deal? What are you talking about?"

"Slater was a federal witness," Quintero said. "He was a biker from San Diego who turned state's evidence and testified against his old gang in a drug case three years ago. I found news clippings about it in his bedroom. After the trial the feds gave him a new identity and parked him up here in the sticks to hide out and start over. As a rancher. Only he wasn't very good at it, was he? I called the F.B.I., Charlie. They're sending a team up from Sacramento and meanwhile they want an airtight lid kept on this thing. It's bad for business when one of their witnesses gets aced. I left Nowak and Schmidt at Slater's to keep an eye on things till the feds take over. If anybody wants to talk to me I'll be at my place."

"Hold on," Hanna said, "where are you going?"

"To take off my uniform," Quintero shrugged, unpinning his badge and laying it on Hanna's desk, "I don't work here any more."

"Keith told me what happened," Carolyn said. She was standing in the locker doorway, her arms folded tightly, hugging herself. She'd been crying, and her eyes were red, but they were dry now. And opaque. "He ah, said you've resigned. That you're leaving."

"That's right," Quintero said, stripping off his uniform shirt and hanging it in the locker. "I don't really belong up here. Any more than Slater did."

"You blame us for what happened, don't you? Keith and me."

"You?" Quintero said, surprised. "No. It wasn't your fault, or Keith's either. Slater's past caught up with him, and that was my fault. All mine. I'm the one who really blew it."

"But—you wanted to let him alone. Keith—"

"Keith wanted to break some rules and roust the guy," he said, banging the locker door closed, "but at least he was honest about why he was doing it. I wasn't."

"I don't understand," she said.

"Look, I've been a cop a long time. I knew damn well something was wrong out there that first morning. A lot of things didn't add up. So I ran Slater through LEIN and he came up clean, gun permit and all. So what? That still didn't explain how he got the permit, or why he kept a gun handy in his truck. Or why a guy who cared enough about animals to raise 'em would shoot two horses just to keep from going into town. I guessed he was hiding something, and if I'd roused him, he'd have told us he was federal and that would've been the end

of it. But when Keith wanted to haul him in, I ah, I balked," he said, swallowing, turning to face her. "Not because I gave a damn about Slater's rights, but because I was trying to impress you with my 'working-class hero' act. And it worked pretty well, too. For me. Not so well for the Slaters."

"But there was no way you could have known—"

"Dammit, it's my job to know what's going down, rules or no rules, only I was too busy—" He broke off, and turned away from her again, staring at the battered locker door as though it held an answer for them. Neither of them spoke for what seemed like a very long time.

"Where will you go?" Carolyn said at last.

"Slater was from San Diego," Quintero sighed, "so the people who hit him probably were, too. I'm going down there to look around. I figure I owe him that much."

"I see," she said slowly, "and what about us?" she said. "What about me? Am I supposed to wait for you or something, on the off chance that you might

give me a call when you're finished in San Diego?"

"Nobody asked you to wait," he said, flushing, "you've got great bloodlines, remember? You're intelligent and attractive, and being rich doesn't hurt. I don't think you'll be lonely for long."

"You're right," she flared, "I probably won't be. In fact I can guarantee it. Nobody walks out on me, Quintero, not even you. If you think you have to do something about this, fine. You go right ahead. But don't expect me to sit around knitting while you're off to the crusades. I'm going with you."

"You're what?"

"I'm going with you. What happened was at least as much my fault as it was yours, so just skip the arguments, okay? I'm going, and that's it."

He stared at her a moment, then shook his head slowly. "That's a pretty crude ploy," he said.

"I know, but it's the best I could do on short notice. Sorry."

"That's all right," he said gently, "I said it was crude. I didn't say no."

FICTION

Revenge

by Charles
D. McIntosh



Illustration by Janet Aulizio

125

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

When George was fifty-one years old and two months short of a thirty-years-of-service retirement, the Great Mogul Insurance Company fired him to save the cost of his pension. Two weeks later, his wife left him to marry a French hairdresser. At the divorce hearing, George tried to sock his wife, but she kicked him hard on the ankle and the hairdresser broke his jaw. Thereupon the court awarded her the house, the money, and the dog.

Because he now needed a job desperately, he answered an ad for a night janitor at a distributor of office furniture and equipment. At the interview, he limped in and wrote notes on a pad in response to the interviewer's questions. He got the job only because they thought he was a mute and crippled, and they needed one additional disadvantaged-minority employee to satisfy federal and state guidelines.

The first night, after four hours of manual labor, George sat down, exhausted, by one of the computers. He wondered nostalgically if it operated anything like the ones at the insurance company. He switched it on and found that it did, except that instead of invoicing premiums and paying claims it was programmed to order, ship, and bill merchandise.

Thereafter, when George stopped to rest his ankle and sip his midnight soup through a straw, he played with the computer. Quickly he came to understand how the distributor's business was organized and how the computer system functioned.

In a few weeks, his jaw and ankle healed. As there was no one around to see him walk or hear him talk, the personnel manager didn't find out he wasn't crippled or a mute, so he wasn't fired for getting well.

One night George sat down at the console and opened an order form on the screen. He fantasized about being able to order anything he wanted. What should it be? A nice "executive" color television to brighten up his cheap rented room? As well ask for the moon, on his wages.

He scanned the form. The system required an address to ship to, normally the billing address, plus an ordering authority. It was then that he had a stroke of genius. Laughing softly, he entered the hairdresser's name, "Pierre LaSalle," followed by "Purchasing Agent" in the "ORDERED BY:" blank. Then he looked up Pierre's home address in the phone book and entered it as the purchasing office address.

Next, he ran the calculator and figured the cost of an annuity that would provide an in-

come equal to the pension he had been cheated out of. It amounted to roughly a hundred and eighty thousand dollars.

He opened the catalogue and began listing office furniture and equipment on the computer screen. Even selecting the finest and most expensive models of everything, it took him quite a long time to commit a hundred and eighty thousand dollars.

In the "SHIP TO:" blank, he typed in the insurance company's name and address. If he knew that company, none of the underlings would question an incoming shipment of executive office furnishings—at least not until well after enough time for the bill to get paid.

Then he opened a second order, for a two thousand dollar giant-screen television—but this was to be shipped to the hairdresser and billed to the insurance company. Why not be generous? In the last analysis perhaps Pierre had done him a favor.

The next three nights he drove by the hairdresser's house on his way to work. Nothing untoward was evident. On the fourth evening, he saw the bright glow of the gigantic screen through the living room window. Pierre had swallowed the bait.

It was predictable. Anyone who would steal another man's wife wouldn't hesitate to accept

a two thousand dollar television delivered to him by apparent mistake.

George knew the insurance company paid promptly, so he was not surprised when, just eleven days later, the computer showed that their check for one hundred seventy-six thousand four hundred dollars had been credited against the hundred and eighty thousand dollar invoice, taking a two percent discount for early payment.

The next week was an anxious one. It was just possible that the hide of the insurance company was so thick it would fail to realize it had paid for a hundred and eighty thousand dollars' worth of unordered furniture. The week passed, and the second one drew toward a close.

On Friday night George found a credit memo in the computer. All the furniture and equipment had been returned to the distributor, and a refund check for the entire amount had been computer-generated and mailed to . . . *Pierre!*

George could no longer contain himself. He jumped up and down, then began dancing around the room, holding the wet mop as though it were a woman. Now there were only two things left to do.

He sat down and typed, on the distributor's letterhead, a letter to the hairdresser:

Dear Mr. LaSalle:
Through computer error, a refund check intended for Mr. Pierre LaSalle, Purchasing Agent of the Great Mogul Insurance Co., was sent to you yesterday. In addition, a giant-screen TV intended as a gift for Mr. LaSalle's personal use was sent to you earlier by error. To avoid mutual embarrassment, we are willing for you to keep the television set, provided you *immediately* return the check for \$176,400 made out in your name. A special messenger will telephone you shortly to make a personal appointment. Please sign the check in his presence to comply with our bank's requirement that we obtain your witnessed written endorsement as release. Your failure to comply will result in the strongest legal steps and publicity

which we both, I am sure, wish to avoid.

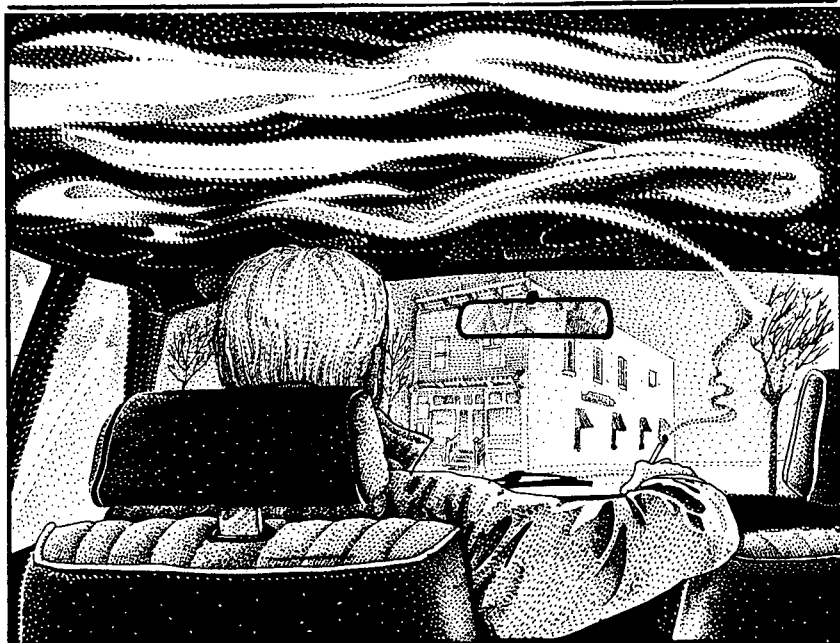
Very truly yours,
John Phelps
Chief Executive Officer

Two days later, George sat in the excellent restaurant of his Geneva hotel, sipping Swiss chocolate as he committed to memory the number of his new bank account. Perhaps he should try acting as a new career; he was still relatively young, and he had been very good disguised as the messenger. He accidentally caught the eye of a languid blonde at a nearby table. She smiled at him.

In that instant, George had his second stroke of genius. He at once relinquished his plan to gloat for years over the problems he had created for the hairdresser, his ex-wife, and the insurance company.

Living well, he now understood, would be a far more satisfying revenge.

FICTION



The Final Deadbeat

by James
G. Holding

I pulled off the road, killed the lights, and put my car into park, leaving the motor running. Then I sat and looked out at the foggy night, hoping I was on a fool's errand, but knowing I wasn't. Damn Wade Lyle for bringing up Milly Burnsides and old man Moran anyway.

I slid a new pack of menthols from my pocket, peeled it open, and knocked one out against a knuckle. I lit it and inhaled. It tasted great. Three years clean and now I was starting again. Damn Wade Lyle for that, too. Then I took both curses back. If I hadn't cared about him, I wouldn't have been there, a hundred yards and more down the way from a lonely roadhouse on an even lonelier country road.

Sobieski's Roadside Tavern, the battered sign said. Sobieski was having a slow night; two cars sat forlornly in the dirt parking lot that faced the two story country tavern from across the highway.

I sat and listened to the engine idle. Fog rolled out of the trees that surrounded the bar; it made soft, colored beacons of the neon beer signs that shone from the first story windows. The night was warm, but I felt cold.

Nothing to do now, I thought, but wait. I'm good at waiting,

I learned it when I was training as a collector under old Jack Brown. Many a night Brownie and I had waited patiently for the lights in a house to go out before slipping in to jimmy open a garage door and hotwire the car inside on a repossession job. I've repo'd more cars than I can remember, more than my share of boats and furniture and appliances as well. I've foreclosed on houses and mobile homes, too, and I've heard every excuse any deadbeat ever devised. Twice. Sometimes I feel like I've spent half my life waiting for some poor slob who's behind in his payments to answer the door or the phone just so I can hit him up for what he owes the bank.

So I'm good at waiting. And collecting debts. That's not a brag, it's a fact. Even at my age, I still get two or three calls from corporate headhunters every year. Mainly it was a small amount of native talent combined with Brownie's training and more than a little determination.

When Brownie retired, I was the one they chose to replace him. Sitting in my car, I remembered how Brownie had told me about the promotion before I'd gone in to see Cassidy, the bank president, to get the same message. Brownie had folded my hand up in one of his

giant paws and had presented me with his prized brass desk plate, the one inscribed with the phrase GET THE MONEY in old English script.

"Words for a collector to live by," the old man had laughed. "No matter what it takes, get the money, just like I taught you. Do that, and you'll prosper right along with the bank." He'd winked. "You'll never lack for work, either." I saw Cassidy and then the three of us went out and got half crocked on martinis. Brownie always called them silver bullets. A good day. A good memory.

Since then, I've always followed Brownie's advice; I've still got the brass plate on my desk. Over the years, I've done some things I'm not proud of, but I've always gotten the money, and, as the bank prospered, so did I. I've got ten guys under me now, and I handle all the bank's collection activities. I made VP in '80 and hit senior VP status last year. I'm appreciated. I know that from things like the way Cassidy and the members of the Board of Directors treated me earlier in the day.

They'd invited me to the big annual wingding they throw at the Lodge, a rustic but posh place out here in the boondocks. I'd spent the day playing cards and trading lies and dirty jokes

and topped it off with a fine meal. Not everybody on the management team gets invited. It was my eighth trip.

I should have enjoyed it. I hadn't. Right now I should be making the long drive home, feeling smug and self-important and too full from dinner. I wasn't. Instead, I was sitting in my big Buick at the side of a country road looking through the fog at Sobieski's Tavern. It was Wade Lyle's fault.

I lit a second smoke from the butt of the first. What was I waiting for? Well, I wasn't positive, but I was pretty sure there would be a murder here in the near future. Or at least a murder attempt.

I'd stopped in to see Wade Lyle before meeting Cassidy and the board. I'd sent him to this small, semi-rural town six months before to fix a delinquency problem in the local branch office. The manager couldn't collect a debt to save his soul and Wade had a tough job; the branch had more slow loans and scheduled items than any other branch we've got. He'd wailed and griped, like any collector would, about the two hour commute from the city through the woods and farmlands, about the lack of any collection efforts in the branch for the prior year, about the people who'd fallen behind that he had

to bring current on their loan schedules, but Wade had done his job. He'd gotten the money.

I'd looked forward to meeting with him all the way from the city. Wade Lyle reminds me of myself, probably the same way I'd reminded Brownie of a younger version of himself. I had good news for him: he'd done such an outstanding job that he was going back to the city.

His doing the job was no surprise. I mean Wade Lyle is good, almost as good as me. He can play a delinquent customer the way a fisherman plays a trout. He can cajole, bully, debate, argue, wheedle, and—often simplest and best—use common sense to devastating effect. He has the uncanny knack of reading people, and he can sense instinctively whether to act like a guy's friend, his father, or his nagging wife. It works. Only the most hardened and dedicated deadbeats can resist him for long.

One was doing just that. It was driving Wade Lyle crazy, and it was why I was parked here, waiting at Sobieski's.

I've often thought that collectors are much like preachers. We care more about the one that was lost than about the ninety and nine that weren't. The one Wade had lost was named Ralph Gregory.

I'd gone in to see him all full of praise and good words and congratulations and news about coming back to the main office. He'd shrugged it off and told me that it hadn't been all that hard. Most of the collections had been routine.

Then he told me he wasn't done with the job yet. There was still Ralph Gregory.

Now, so you'll understand, I should tell you about collectors. When we work, we do it with customers nobody else wants. Collecting is hard work, trying to squeeze money out of people who legally owe it but won't or can't pay it. We deal with the troubled, the unlucky, the divorced, the recalcitrant, the foolish, the drunken, the out of work, the hurt, the just plain rotten and dishonest. We're the bank's sewer men, and we clean up problems that lead us through some of the nastiest areas of life. Most of us learn our trade in a hard school, consumer discount loan companies, and when we get a job in a real bank, we feel like we've entered the promised land and we work our tails off to stay there. The pressure to perform is intense, but we handle it, one way or another, and we get the money.

Good collectors, ones like Wade Lyle, thrive and revel in a shared and personal pride

that you won't find in any other department in the bank.

That was Wade's problem: pride. And Ralph Gregory.

He couldn't appreciate the compliments or the praise or even his own accomplishment because Gregory was still beating him.

All a boss can do is listen and advise. I had him get Gregory's collection record, the printed card we use to record contacts with any given delinquent. It looked bad even to my jaded eyes. I told Wade to fill me in and let me run.

He described Ralph Gregory as a great fat slob of a man and as the very best debt dodger ever. If countries made up teams of deadbeats to compete in the Olympics, he said, this guy would not only head our team, he'd take the gold medal.

He owed us the moon. Some jackass of a loan officer had let him cross-mortgage properties all over the county into a huge, tangled mess.

If Gregory had been normal, Wade could have straightened it all out with a few calls, a visit or two, a little charm, maybe even a snarl. Ralph Gregory, though, was bulletproof.

Mailing letters was a waste of time. Legal action—foreclosure—was, too. With all the new laws, there are a million ways to protest or appeal

a foreclosure proceeding. Wade had tried to foreclose on two of the loans and Gregory had him hogtied in court. Gregory could drag a string of appeals out for a year or more each. Then all he had to do was bring the account current, and he could start all over. He had so many properties and loans that Wade and the lawyers were just running in circles. Some legal system.

Wade had only been able to talk to the man once, right after he'd come to town. Wade had told him why he was calling and who he was, all in accordance with the fancy new debt collection practices laws that "protect" the precious consumer and hamstring us collectors. It turned out that Gregory knew the debt laws better than Wade. The conversation ended with Gregory belching into the phone before hanging up.

It was all downhill from there. The law and Gregory both said Wade couldn't approach him at work. The law also said Wade couldn't call Gregory at his home before eight in the morning or after nine at night. Knowing this, Gregory hid out. When he wasn't working—he was a teacher—he spent his mornings drinking coffee and his evenings drinking beer at Sobieski's Tavern.

Wade tried. He'd call So-

bieski's and the bartender would tell him Gregory wasn't there and Wade would be stuck. He couldn't even stop in for a beer on the way home at night because even a chance meeting with Gregory there could constitute "harassment" and Gregory could then complain to our federal and state banking regulators. Like I said, some legal system.

I listened and I thought and I told Wade the truth as I saw it. The whole Gregory deal was a writeoff. Wade wouldn't accept that; Gregory had him on the run.

At that point, I told him he couldn't make a career out of one deadbeat. I knew. So, I tried to lighten things up with my story about Milly Burnside. He'd probably heard it before; it's almost reached legendary status in the bank.

I'd been new at the job, working for Brownie, wanting to do good, and concentrating on a female deadbeat, Milly Burnside. Milly was about four feet high and four feet wide and I'd been hammering at her for five or six months and getting no cooperation at all. One day, the receptionist called me to say that Milly was waiting to see me. I ran to the lobby expecting her to come across with a big payment or something. Instead, she brought her fist up from

somewhere below floor level and knocked me flat on my back. Broke my jaw in two places, in front of at least thirty witnesses.

Wade and I both laughed and the mood lightened.

Then he asked what few others ever had: what had finally happened to the account and to Milly?

I remembered and my laugh faded. I told him she'd died. Fell down a flight of steps and broke her neck. Luckily for the bank, she'd had insurance on the loan, and the company had paid us in full.

Wade nodded thoughtfully and thanked God for insurance. Then he brought up another old story, the one about Abner Moran. Wade had just started working for us and I'd sent him out to a rundown mobile home to get crippled old Abner to sign up for life insurance on his trailer loan. He was a chronic old deadbeat and I wanted him covered by life insurance just in case.

Wade had spent four hours in that pesthole of a trailer, surrounded by filth and stink and talking to the bedridden old man for all he was worth. He'd signed him up, and the insurance company paid his loan off ten weeks later when the trailer burned down with Abner in it.

That's when I started to get

cold, talking about insurance. I checked the record card. Ralph Gregory carried insurance on every one of his loans.

I gave Wade about as hard a lecture as I could. I told him to forget Gregory, to pack his things, clean out his desk, and head home. He agreed and seemed to accept the orders. He even started gathering his stuff.

As he worked, we talked about the drive home. We'd both heard that fog was expected, and we reminded each other to be careful. The danger isn't so much the bad roads or the fog itself, it's deer. They don't pay attention to traffic, and if they're crossing the road and you don't see them in the fog, you can have a bad accident. I've hit three myself over the years. Wade seemed convinced that somewhere out there a deer was waiting with his name on it.

We spent some more time in small talk. Then we shook hands. I was off to my date with the bigwigs; he would tie up any loose ends that were left and would head home after the bank closed that evening.

On the way to my afternoon, I stopped at a gas station and got directions to Sobieski's Tavern.

So there I was, looking through the night and smoking and thinking and worrying. I checked my watch. It was about

nine o'clock. The law said that Wade couldn't contact Gregory after nine, so Gregory would probably leave the bar a few minutes after, cross the road to his car in the lot, and go home.

If my fears were correct, though, Wade Lyle would roar up out of the night just as the deadbeat crossed the road. The cops would probably call it a hit and run; the bank would get its money from the insurance on the loans; and Wade Lyle would be a murderer.

I prayed I was wrong, but like I said, Wade reminds me of myself, and I knew in my heart that I'd figured it right.

After the bank closed, Wade would have killed time until nine. He would be smart enough to have found a deserted spot in the woods somewhere down the road. He'd have water there and a sponge or rag, and he'd have a dead deer, a road kill most likely or one he'd poached for the occasion.

Wade would run Gregory down and head for that spot. He would clean the blood from his car carefully, then replace it with the deer's. He would drag the deer or its hide over the car to embed its hair in the bumper and in the dents and cracks that the collision would put in the front of the car. When he finished, it would look exactly like he'd hit a deer. Tomorrow, Wade

would call attention to the fact, showing co-workers the damage and cursing his luck, the need for repairs and body work, and the slowness of his insurance agency.

And he'd be a murderer.

My car was full of smoke. I'd forgotten the rank, stale smell and I went to roll down the windows. I was reaching across the seat to get the one on the passenger side, so I almost missed seeing the front door of the bar open. Pale yellow light hit the fog and dissipated in a gauzy haze. I straightened and watched a grossly fat man ease himself down the concrete stairs. He stopped and stretched hugely; then he began walking across the road to the lot.

I felt more than saw or heard the little import rip out of the night. I recognized it as Wade's car as it screamed past and I saw Wade, his face locked in a snarl, at the wheel.

I was almost too late. Cursing, I dropped the Buick into gear and stomped on the gas. The car bucked and lurched and gravel flew as I bounced off the berm and onto the blacktop. Lyle was ahead of me, but I was gaining.

Things seemed to slow down. My front bumper came even with Wade's rear, then began to move up alongside. Wade realized something was happen-

ing and flashed a quick look to his left. We were thundering down the road, side by side. He saw me, recognized me. Our eyes locked and we stared at each other for an endless half second. Then I wrenched my wheel hard to the right, crunching in the side of his car and sending him careering into the parking lot. He must have spiked his brakes. As soon as he hit the dirt of the lot, he was spinning, out of control, surrounded by a cloud of dust, and heading for the parked cars.

I looked back at the road, and there was Gregory. The fool hadn't moved. Frozen, he watched us bear down on him like a rabbit caught in a set of headlights. I couldn't stop or turn. There wasn't time. The front of my car caught him between his knees and his hips. His upper torso snapped down onto the hood and I carried him thirty yards, trying to slow down, to stop. His hands clawed at the car, reaching for me, and his eyes pleaded. Then the eyes glazed over and the big man slumped to the ground as I stopped the car.

He was dead by the time I got to him. I lurched off the road into some bushes and threw up. People came from the bar. I heard voices, Wade's among them. I sat by the road and shook. And wept.

Then the police were there and an ambulance full of technicians who couldn't do any good. There were questions and a trip into town and signed statements and, later, there was an inquest.

The police accepted the story that I'd been trying to pass Wade. They never made the connection between Gregory's delinquent loans and the involvement of two bank employees in the accident. Nobody caught the fact that I'd had my lights off, either. Dark, foggy night, a straight stretch of lonely road, and death by misadventure.

Oh, yeah. The bank got its money from the insurance agency.

The funny thing was that it really had been an accident. I never meant for Gregory to die. I didn't want to kill him, I just wanted to keep Wade Lyle from killing him.

And I had, too. Now Wade

won't have to go through life seeing those clutching hands, the pleading eyes; he won't hear the sick, hard thud of the car hitting Gregory's body. I will.

I'll live with it, though, the same way I've lived with the sound of the pipe hitting and breaking Milly Burnsides' neck before I threw her down the stairs and the sound of crippled old Abner Moran screaming as the kerosene took hold and spread the fire through his mobile home, and all the other sights and sounds and smells of forty years of collecting.

I've decided to take early retirement. Wade Lyle will replace me. The two of us went out last night and drank martinis. I made a silent toast to Brownie and I gave Wade the old man's brass desk plate.

Earlier, I'd had it re-engraved. Now it reads: GET THE MONEY—LEGALLY.

It's the best advice I can give him.

FICTION

Last Round

by Bill Crenshaw

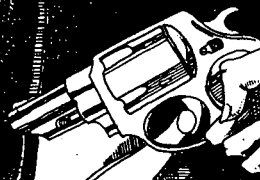


Illustration by George Thompson

138

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Leonard was already coming back from the bar with another round when Ronnie leaned her sweet, loose-bloused self across the bottle rings on the table and said to me, "You know he's setting you up."

It took me two or three seconds before I could ask what the hell that meant, but by then Leonard was almost back and she waved her fingers to shut me up. About the last thing I needed was to hear something like that just before we pulled a job.

"Last round, Cory," said Leonard, laughing and plopping down the bottles of Bud. He smacked mine down too hard and it foamed and ran down the sides. "Tonight you gotta be sober as a judge." He raised his bottle and I raised mine and Ronnie raised hers and we clinked them together. We were all smiles.

Now I wouldn't call Leonard my best friend, but we'd done some jobs together and we made a good team. But they were little jobs, and this one was big. We were even bringing in two other guys. Leonard was bringing them in, I remembered. They were *his* guys.

The three of us just sat there and talked and smiled a while longer. It was hard to just sit there, but I tried to look natu-

ral. We'd already been there a long time, like we always were before a job, me and Leonard nursing our beers, Ronnie knocking hers back like water, like always, now and again doing a shot of whisky to clear her palate, she'd say. She'd say it like a joke. I'd laugh and Leonard would laugh, too. Leonard always laughed real loud at Ronnie's jokes. Too loud, I thought, the kind of loud that makes the guy at the next table turn around to see what's up. I told him once not to try so hard to please her—you try too hard, she loses interest, I told him, but he got so mad I never said anything again. Now I was thinking maybe he should've listened. Maybe that's why she told me he was going to set me up.

I wanted to talk to Ronnie alone about what she told me, but I didn't get a chance to. They finished their beers and left, leaving me with a table of empties and the tab. Ronnie gave me a knowing look over her shoulder.

But a look wasn't enough, and what she'd told me wasn't enough. I had to know more. In our line of work you got to have trust, you know. I mean the whole enterprise is built on trust, sort of. You've got to know the man at your back, got to trust him to do for you what

he wants you to do for him. And now Ronnie said he was setting me up. The world was in a sorry state.

Putting on my uniform back in the apartment, I tried to figure it out. What had I done to Leonard? Why would he set me up? As far as I knew, I hadn't done anything, but now that I thought about Leonard's behavior over the last few weeks, I could see that maybe he was being sort of strange. Things that hadn't made much sense did make sense now that I knew he was planning to set me up. Things like inviting me to go to the wrestling with him and Ronnie, making the trip to the bar for the beers, little things, nice things. Not pulling so many jokes on me. Leonard was a great one for jokes, especially banana peel jokes, the kind where somebody else's bum gets whacked. Leonard was all the time pulling jokes on people and laughing. If Ronnie herself had slipped down a manhole on a banana peel, he would have laughed, I betcha. He pulled jokes on me, too, but it was all in fun so I couldn't stay mad.

But setting me up wasn't all in fun. Maybe the problem was Ronnie. Maybe he was blaming me if she was getting tired of him. Isn't it funny how you always blame the guy that warns you not to do something when

you go ahead and do it and get hurt? He shouldn't've gotten mad at that. All I was doing was trying to warn him.

And now Ronnie was trying to warn me. I had to do something to cover myself. I ran through the details of the job, trying to see where the setup would come. The more I tried to work it out, the madder I got and the harder it was to think. I called Ronnie once to find out what she knew, but Leonard answered, so I just hung up. He'd be with her until the job, like always. She was Leonard's squeeze. Maybe "was" like in "used to be." I didn't know why she had snitched, and I was glad she had, but she should have told me more.

I'd have to work it out myself. I got myself to calm down and think it through. Leonard was probably in on this setup with the new guys he was bringing in. I decided that the setup had to come on the way out. Getting in, they needed me to take care of Al, the other security guard, and they needed me to let them in the service door by the mall's loading dock. They might need me to help them get up on the crawlways above the suspended ceiling. For sure they needed me to do the rounds while they were in Gerrold's Jewels. But they didn't need me to get out, and afterwards I'd just be one

more split they had to make with the profits.

Well; if that was their game, I'd be ready.

My shift started at midnight. The plan was this. Al had the north half of the mall and I had the south half. We followed this regular routine. We would start together in the middle at the checkpoint near the fountain, right across from Gerrold's Jewels, and we'd walk our rounds, punching in at the clocks at three other checkpoints and then meeting at the fountain after a half hour. It was pretty much constant walking. Southern Security doesn't let its people sit down much.

So what I was supposed to do was conk Al on the head at 2 A.M. and let in Leonard and the guys. I'd tie Al up and gag and blindfold him and start my rounds and one of the guys would take Al's card and key and start his, because if we miss punching a clock by five minutes at the outside, an alarm goes off at Southern Security and our walkie-talkies start asking embarrassing questions. So while we're doing the rounds, Leonard and one of the guys would get up into the ceiling and scuttle over to Gerrold's Jewels and drop down and just take their pick of all that stuff. Then back up the rope ladder, back across, back down. It would

look like they'd been hiding in the ceiling all day and that they dropped down on us at the fountain clock. Leonard even made it look like they'd gone up through a bathroom, if the local cops were good enough to find it. This was all to protect me, so Leonard said. And once they came down, they'd conk me on the head just enough to raise a good knot, and tie me up just like Al. That way I'd be in the clear. I figured they planned to hit me a little too hard. It was going to be a surprise. It was going to be more of a surprise than they thought.

Two o'clock came around quick. I hated hitting Al like that, but I had to make it a good one or he wouldn't've gone down. I let in the boys and we tied Al up and a guy named Jackson started Al's rounds. Leonard said, "Great work, Cory," which I resented because it made it seem like this was *his* heist and I was somebody he hired instead of his partner, and anyway I knew he had plans for me. They got up into the ceiling and I jogged down to punch my first clock and jogged back to Gerrold's Jewels to watch them through those cage kind of doors they close off mall stores with.

I have to say they were smooth. High quality ice in those cases lifted out as gentle as whispers. Leonard grinned

and held up a necklace for me to see, and it almost glowed against his black glove, and I saw myself fastening the clasp on Ronnie's sweet neck while she held up all that hair with both hands. Then I had to jog back and punch the second clock on my round.

But I was happier now. I realized now that Ronnie had told me because she liked me. That was good, because I liked her. She was tired of Leonard, I was tired of Leonard, and the joke was going to be on Leonard. Leonard wouldn't have laughed at that, I betcha.

By the time I got back from the second clock they were coming down by the fountain. Leonard was one big grin now, couldn't wait, I thought, to hit me too hard. You could just hear how eager he was. "Great work, Cory," he said again. "We're all gonna be rich men. You want I should tie you up or hit you first?" And he laughed at that. It was like in a movie. It was like he was giving me my cue.

Once I pulled my piece, I had to shoot. And I did. They hadn't brought guns because it wasn't that kind of job, but they still tried to rush me when they saw what I was doing. Leonard thought I was trying to take the whole haul for myself, but then he would, since that was what

he was trying to do to me.

But I had better plans. Since I hadn't finished the last round, Southern Security would be getting a wake-up call any time. When that alarm went off, they'd call us. We wouldn't answer. They'd call the cops. Which was what I wanted.

I hit myself in the head with my own piece, enough to raise a welt and draw a little blood. Then I mashed Leonard's hand around it to get some blood on the glove so it would look like he'd hit me and held the piece on me. I'd be lying there when the cops came in. I'd tell them that they dropped out of the ceiling on us, conked Al, hit me, and made me tell them about the time clocks and the rounds. I'd tell them that Leonard threatened to say I was in on the heist if I didn't go along with it. I'd tell them I got the jump on Leonard just as they were dropping back down with the jewels. I'd tell them I fought them off. Then I'd maybe pass out. I could fake a concussion. I'd be a hero and maybe get a bonus.

I hit myself in the head a couple of more times and stretched out and waited. I maybe went to sleep before they got there.

All the way over in the ambulance I kept thinking about how neat it had come off, and I kept thinking about Ronnie.

I guess I'd been liking her for a while now, and she must have been liking me, too. The more I thought about it, the more obvious it was. She must have been hinting for months. I never was quick with the hints. I couldn't wait to see her again. I was sorry that I couldn't hang those rocks around her neck, but if I got a decent bonus, I could buy her something nice.

I liked the hero treatment—private room, cutie nurses, a Southern Security guard on the door in case any of the "gang" tried to take me out. I told them there were maybe six of them instead of three. I hadn't been in the hospital an hour when Ronnie came in. There were two cops with her, there as a guard, too, I guessed, and they stood in the door and looked at me. They made me a little nervous, but then cops always do.

I was glad to see Ronnie, though, especially looking that good. She liked me. She had saved me. When I got out of the hospital, we'd get together. I'd take her to the wrestling. I'd stay over at her place until it was time for the job.

I lifted my eyelids halfway. I gave her a weak little smile and a feeble wave. She came over to my bed, and I made out like I was feeling worse than I was, and she stroked my forehead with that cool soft hand, and asked in that sweet-baby voice of hers why the hell I had shot her honey.

My eyes popped right open when she said that. Then I was glad she'd brought the cops with her or that they'd brought her with them because it took both of them to get her fingers off my throat. She kept screaming and kicking while the cops held her back. She kept yelling why had I killed her man.

"You said he was setting me up," I said when I could get my throat to work right again.

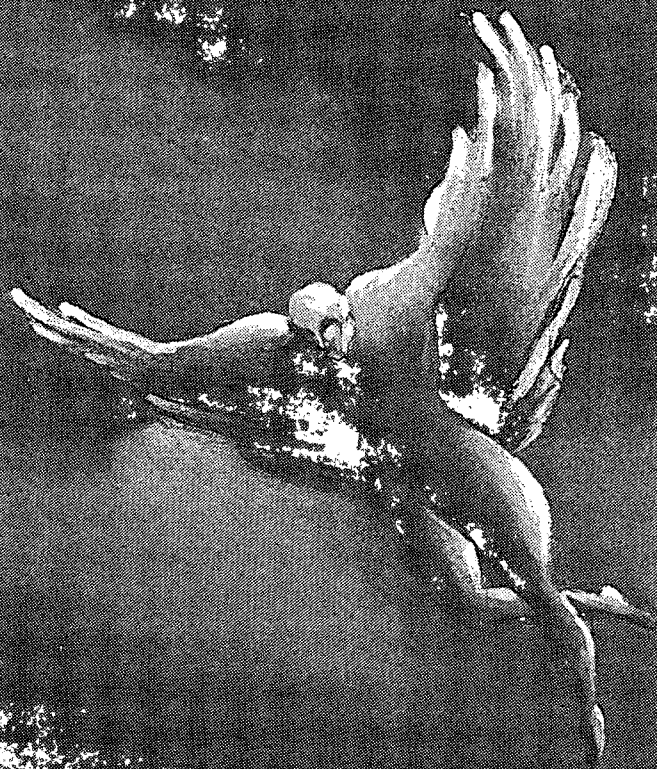
"With the tab, you jerk," she screamed. "He was going to stick you with the tab again."

It took a few seconds to sink in. "Oh," I said, finally. "Oh, yeah."

Leonard had gotten me again. Even with Ronnie tipping me off, he got me. He would've laughed at that, I betcha. Maybe.

MYSTERY CLASSIC

The Pool of the Stone God



by A. Merritt

Illustration by Karen Stolper

144

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

This is Professor James Marston's story. A score of learned bodies have courteously heard him tell it, and then among themselves have lamented that so brilliant a man should have such an obsession. Professor Marston told it to me in San Francisco, just before he started to find the island that holds his pool of the stone god and the wings that guard it. He seemed to me very sane. It is true that the equipment of his expedition was unusual, and not the least curious part of it are the suits of fine chain mail and masks and gauntlets with which each man of the party was provided.

"The five of us," said Professor Marston, "sat side by side on the beach. There was Wilkinson the first officer. Bates and Cassidy the two seamen, Waters the pearler, and myself. We had all been on our way to New Guinea, I to study the fossils for the Smithsonian. The *Moranus* had struck the hidden reef the night before and had sunk swiftly. We were then, roughly, about five hundred miles northeast of the Guinea coast. The five of us had managed to drop a lifeboat and get away. The boat was well stocked with water and provisions. Whether the rest of the crew had escaped we did not know. We had sighted the island at dawn and had made for her. The lifeboat was drawn safely up on the sands.

" 'We'd better explore a bit, anyway,' said Waters. 'This may be a perfect place for us to wait rescue. At least until the typhoon season is over. We've our pistols. Let's start by following this brook to its source, look over the place, and then decide what we'll do.'

"The trees began to thin out. We saw ahead an open space. We reached it and stopped in sheer amazement. The clearing was perfectly square and about five hundred feet wide. The trees stopped abruptly at its edges as though held back by something unseen.

"But it was not this singular impression that held us. At the far end of the square were a dozen stone huts clustered about one slightly larger. They reminded me powerfully of those prehistoric structures you see in parts of England and France. I approach now the most singular thing about this whole singular and sinister place. In the center of the space was a pool walled about with huge blocks of cut stone. At the side of the pool rose a great stone figure, carved in the semblance of a man with outstretched hands. It was at least twenty feet high and was extremely well executed. At the distance the statue seemed nude

—Originally published in American Weekly in 1923 under the byline W. Fenimore.

and yet it had a peculiar effect of drapery about it. As we drew nearer we saw that it was covered from ankles to neck with the most extraordinary carved wings. They looked exactly like bat wings when they were folded.

"There was something extremely disquieting about this figure. The face was inexpressibly ugly and malignant. The eyes, Mongol-shaped, slanted evil. It was not from the face, though, that this feeling seemed to emanate. It was from the body covered with the wings—and especially from the wings. They were a part of the idol and yet they gave one the idea that they were clinging to it.

"Cassidy, a big brute of a man, swaggered up to the idol and laid his hand on it. He drew it away quickly, his face white, his mouth twitching. I followed him and, conquering my unscientific repugnance, examined the stone. It, like the huts and in fact the whole place, was clearly the work of that forgotten race whose monuments are scattered over the Southern Pacific. The carving of the wings was wonderful. They were batlike, as I have said, folded, and each ended in a little ring of conventionalized feathers. They ranged in size from four to ten inches. I ran my fingers over one. Never have I felt the equal of the nausea that sent me to my knees before the idol. The wing had felt like smooth, cold stone, but I had the sensation of having touched back of the stone some monstrous, obscene creature of a lower world. The sensation came of course, I reasoned, only from the temperature and texture of the stone—and yet this did not really satisfy me.

"Dusk was soon due. We decided to return to the beach and examine the clearing further on the morrow. I desired greatly to explore the stone huts.

"We started back through the forest. We walked some distance and then night fell. We lost the brook. After a half hour's wandering, we thought we were approaching the beach. Then Waters clutched my arm. I stopped. Directly in front of us was the open space with the stone god leering under the moon and the green water shining at his feet!

"We had made a circle. Bates and Wilkinson were exhausted. Cassidy swore that devils or no devils he was going to camp that night beside the pool.

"The moon was very bright. And it was so very quiet. My scientific curiosity got the better of me and I thought I would examine the huts. I left Bates on guard and walked over to the

largest. There was only one room and the moonlight shining through chinks in the wall illuminated it clearly. At the back were two small basins set in the stone. I looked in one and saw a faint reddish gleam reflected from a number of globular objects. I drew a half dozen of them out. They were pearls, very wonderful pearls of a peculiarly rosy hue. I ran toward the door to call Bates—and stopped.

"My eyes had been drawn to the stone idol. Was it an effect of the moonlight or did it move? No, it was the wings! They stood out from the stone and waved—they waved, I say, from the ankles to the neck of that monstrous statue.

"Bates had seen them, too. He was standing with his pistol raised. Then there was a shot. And after that the air was filled with a rushing sound like that of a thousand fans. I saw the wings loose themselves from the stone god and sweep down in a cloud upon the four men. Another cloud raced up from the pool and joined them. I could not move. The wings circled swiftly around and about the four. All were now on their feet and I never saw such horror as was in their faces.

"Then the wings closed in. They clung to my companions as they had clung to the stone.

"I fell back into the hut. I lay there through the night insane with terror. Many times I heard the fanlike rushing about the enclosure, but nothing entered my hut. Dawn came, and silence, and I dragged myself to the door. There stood the stone god with the wings carved upon him as we had seen him ten hours before.

"I ran over to the four lying on the grass. I thought that perhaps I had had a nightmare. But they were dead. That was not the worst of it. Each man was shrunken to his bones! They looked like collapsed white balloons. There was not a drop of blood in them. They were nothing but bones wrapped around in white skin.

"Mastering myself I went close to the idol. There was something different about it. It seemed larger—as though, the thought went through my mind, as though it had eaten. Then I saw that it was covered with tiny drops of blood that had dropped from the ends of the wings that clothed it.

"I do not remember what happened afterward. I awoke on the pearling schooner *Luana* which had picked me up, crazed with thirst as they supposed in the boat of the *Moranus*."

BOOKED & PRINTED

by Mary Cannon



ANNE PERRY

This British author has staked out Victorian London as the milieu for her mysteries, and she has no peer. As Ellis Peters has done with the Middle Ages, Perry has created such a detailed world for her detecting duo to inhabit that this reader always feels as if she's time-tripping.

For starters there's *The Cater Street Hangman* (1980), which marked the debut of the outspoken society spinster Charlotte Ellison and the rumpled Scotland Yard inspector Thomas Pitt. The brutal murder of a young maid in the Ellison household brings Pitt into the upper-class neighborhood, even into the front parlors of some of the square's nicer homes. His shrewd investigation pries open

some of the Ellison secrets—including Charlotte's surprising feelings for Pitt himself—and when tragedy strikes much closer to home, events soon reach a climax.

Cater Street has it all: an intriguing plot, multi-level characters, plenty of period atmosphere and detail, and a dash of romance. So what does author Perry do next? She does it again . . . and again . . . and again. *The Cater Street Hangman* was but the first in a series of Charlotte and Thomas Pitt mysteries which number eight—to date, that is.

And they're all outstanding. The plots remain exceptionally drawn—*Resurrection Row* has a corpse that won't stay buried—and characters introduced

in the early books sometimes show up again, and in more central roles, in later novels. Certainly Charlotte and Thomas, happily married soon after the first book concludes, are developed with each book.

It's the Victorian detailing, though, that makes Perry's novels so appealing. These are not the books to pick up if you like lots of heartstopping action in your thrillers, and graphic descriptions of murder. Perry's murders are gruesome and often bizarre (both true to the Victorian taste for such things), but she doesn't dwell on them especially. I'd guess that there's as much ink given to descriptions of room decorations and ladies' gowns as there is to cataloguing Scotland Yard's methods. Perry's picture of Victorian England is of a strictly structured society, largely run by inflexible rules and deeply-entrenched beliefs and preju-

dices. We quickly become apprised of what's appropriate for morning calls, for funeral attire, for charity work. Pitt's "beat" is homicide, and the cases chronicled in Perry's novels are those that lead him back to the upper-crust neighborhoods and fancy squares where his wife once dwelled. (This, naturally, allows Charlotte and her impetuous younger sister to stick their noses into Thomas' cases by conducting their own investigations.) One could argue that the violence which so often strikes Charlotte's family and acquaintances exceeds probability; but why cavil?

Look for *The Cater Street Hangman* first, then pick up the others as you will: *Bluegate Fields*, *Callander Square*, *Death in the Devil's Acre*, *Paragon Walk*, *Resurrection Row*, *Rutland Place* and the newest, *Cardington Crescent*. Look for them in Fawcett paperback editions.

MYSTERY REVIEWS

Elizabeth Peters—a.k.a. Barbara Michaels—is probably not new to you readers. Still, be sure to seek out a copy of *Die for Love* (Tor, \$3.50, 274 pp.) if you missed it in hardcover. Peters has several ongoing series, so you'll want to now that this is a Jacqueline Kirby novel. She's the droll and very independent college librarian, this time off to New York to attend a convention of historical romance writers. (Kirby will use any excuse to make her New York jaunt tax-deductible, you see.) If you know Peters, you'll be able to tell from this scenario that the cat is definitely among the pigeons here. *Die for Love* lives up to its promise of witty, literate entertainment for discriminating mystery readers.

A female protagonist of an entirely different hue is the title

character in Evelyn E. Smith's **Miss Melville Rêgrets** (Fawcett, \$2.95, 280 pp.). Susan Melville, whose background, breeding, education, and choice of syntax indubitably remind one of Miss Manners herself, finds her fortunes (literally) taking a sharp dip. She has lived for a long time in genteel poverty in the family's huge, rent-controlled New York apartment. Now she's lost her teaching job; worse, her apartment building is going co-op. Events take a few ironic turns, and Miss Melville manages to successfully assassinate a blackguardly real estate mogul. The incident proves to be the on-the-job training for her new career. The satirical premise here is that a single woman in America—one who isn't particularly beautiful or powerful or wealthy—is practically invisible, thus providing such a hit woman with a perfect cover. This is a delightfully fresh heroine whose adventures are told with a droll wit, tongue firmly placed in cheek.

The Narrowing Circle (Penguin, \$5.95, 224 pp.) is another stylish thriller by Julian Symons. This one is set behind the scenes in a pulp magazine empire, and centers around the misadventures of Dave Nelson, one of the editors. Dave is, as the British would say, no better than he ought to be, but he has no trouble believing that he deserves the top job at *Crime Magazine*, the newest of the company's tabloids. When there's an upset behind the closed doors of upper management, Dave wants to know what happened; he hints at foul play. But when his rival is murdered, Dave begins to learn the real meaning of the words "foul play." Dave's the prime suspect, and it looks as if he'll have to turn up the real killer to save his own neck.

Thomas Maxwell's **The Saberdene Variations** is a thoroughly compelling novel designed on an ambitious scale (Mysterious Press, \$16.95, 2263 pp.). The protagonist is Charles Nichols, a sane, successful, and reasonably sophisticated author of true-crime bestsellers. He is also an old college friend of the flamboyant trial lawyer Victor Saberdene, with whom Nichols maintains a warm—if intermittent—friendship. When Saberdene asks Nichols for help, he gets it. The fates, however, have decreed that Victor Saberdene will get more from his old college chum than he bargained for. This is an outstanding suspense novel, rich in detail and background, intricately plotted, peopled with unique and totally credible characters, and exploring adult themes of loyalty, friendship, obsessive behavior, and even sexual addiction. This is a big book that deserves a huge audience.

The Body in the Billiard Room is another Inspector Ghote

adventure by H.R.F. Keating (Viking, \$15.95, 247 pp.), and it's a delight. Someone important has pulled some strings at the Bombay headquarters, and Ghote humbly finds himself bound for the tiny hill village of Ootacamund. "Ooty," as it is called, is an old resort town, a bastion of British colonial ways, and Ghote has been summoned to solve the murder of a servant in the heart of the British community: the billiard room at the private membership club. Ghote unearths a number of heretofore well-kept secrets as he goes about his business, trying to ignore the official who sent for the detective, a retired man devoted to the works of Doyle and Christie whose idea of a jolly good time is to play Watson to Ghote's Holmes. There is a lot to appreciate here: lively characters, a suitable murder mystery, and Ghote's ever-fresh outlook on a world often portrayed as hopelessly jaded. If you haven't discovered India's cleverest sleuth, try this adventure.

The Rag Doll Murder by H. Paul Jeffers (Ballantine, \$2.95, 195 pp.) takes its readers back in time to New York in the mid-thirties. Harry MacNeil, private eye, is hired by the movie star sister of a just-murdered fashion model. The cops have arrested a kid, a retarded delivery boy, but the victim's sister is certain they have made a mistake. The dead girl had a dog that barked furiously every time the poor kid made a delivery; it was a standing joke. The plot here is pretty conventional, and MacNeil sounds a lot like private eyes of today. The picture of New York, though, and the details of the flourishing "rag trade"—the fashion industry—are something different.

Ruth Rendell, writing as Barbara Vine, follows up her award-winning *Dark-Adapted Eye* with another suspense novel. **A Fatal Inversion** (Bantam, \$14.95, 268 pp.) opens in England when a couple go to bury their dead dog in an isolated pet cemetery on their large property, and turn up the remains of a young woman and a baby. The focus then switches to Adam Verne-Smith, the previous owner of the estate, and the odd group of friends who were with him that summer of 1976 when tragedy struck. In her quietly compelling voice the author unfolds the secrets of the past, and tension builds as one waits for the tragedy to unfold in its entirety.



Copyright © 1987 Tri-Star Pictures, Inc.

Cher and Dennis Quaid in *Suspect*.

LICENSED **T52** UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

MURDER BY DIRECTION

by Peter Shaw



In a season that has seen a resurgence of the mystery movie, **Suspect** stands out as one of the best. A courtroom drama, mystery, and thriller combined, it rides on a tightly-wrought plot and the star chemistry of Dennis Quaid and the rock singer Cher. Four characters—a juror, a defense attorney, a judge, and an accused murderer—have started out at radically different levels of life in Washington, D.C., and moved toward the same courtroom trial as if by some supernatural fate.

Judge Matthew Helms learns of his impending appointment to a high court vacancy and arranges to switch assignments to a short-term, routine murder case so as to clear his calendar. Kathleen Riley, an overworked, lovelorn public defender played by Cher, is

assigned to the case by Helms despite her protests that she is overdue for a vacation. Eddie Sanger, played by Dennis Quaid, is a slick, high-pressure milk lobbyist who has to serve his jury duty just as a crucial House vote is in the offing. Finally, Carl Wayne Anderson, the suspect of the title, is a derelict who has been found with a murdered secretary's wallet in his possession. She, coincidentally, worked for the judge whose suicide left the court vacancy that Judge Helms' is slated to fill.

The judge keeps hurrying the case along, even though the defense needs a delay in order to locate a second derelict who may have committed the murder. Carl Wayne Anderson is by turns moody and violent. He sits impassively at the defense table, then overturns it in a fit of rage. For the remainder of

the trial Judge Helms has him kept in handcuffs. Cher is terrified by her client, who has struck her at a pre-trial interview, cutting her near her eye. But she fights on doggedly for him, learning that he is deaf and has not been able to speak since serving in Vietnam.

Lobbyist Dennis Quaid knits together the fates of the four characters. Skeptical about the case against Anderson, he starts his own investigation in between court sessions and frantic dashes over to the House of Representatives to see how his milk vote is shaping up. When he finds evidence that could prove to be in Anderson's favor, he tries to pass it to Cher, who nervously explains to him that she can be disbarred for consorting with a juror. But even though Judge Helms has had his suspicions aroused about the two, she cannot pass up Quaid's information, which offers the only chance to save her client.

Needless to say, Quaid and Cher fall in love even as their investigation leads them into the dangers that provide the thriller element in *Suspect*. They manage only one brief kiss before the end, but there is electricity in the air whenever they are on screen together. Quaid, whose Cajun

accent and acting we recently praised in our review of *The Big Easy*, effectively conveys the difference between his initial, professional, womanizing charm (he seduces a congresswoman to gain an extra vote for the milk bill), and his genuine infatuation with Cher. We were reminded of Romeo mooning first over Rosalind, and then in an only slightly but significantly different way, over Juliet.

Cher carries off her role as an overworked, disappointed, but not disillusioned do-gooder with impressive authenticity. Her very lack of courtroom presence rings true for the seemingly routine kind of case she has been assigned to. Like the acting, the other elements of *Suspect* ring true as well. The dialogue is witty but believable; the plot with its surprise ending is easy to follow but surprisingly tricky; the Washington settings lend authenticity; the minor characters are convincing. Having preached the virtues of careful attention to detail instead of the reach for profound social comment in the making of mystery movies, and having preached as well against gratuitous sex and violence, we can now offer *Suspect* as a top-notch example of self-assured professionalism.

THE STORY THAT WON

The October Mysterious Photograph was won by Jo Taylor of Madmen's go to Ray R. House Patricia Beene of Henderson, Ontario, Canada; Jan sylvania; Michelle Rance of Rendon of Simi Valley, California; Virginia Sauter of Bergenfield, New Jersey; Gerry Lee of Palmetto, Florida; and Lee DeWitt, Jr., of Waipahu, Hawaii.



tograph contest (see photo) ison Wisconsin. Honorable of Webster Groves, Missouri; Texas; Allan Sullivan of To-Streilein of Johnstown, Penn-Indianapolis, Indiana; Cathy fornia; J. N. Merz of Bryan, Texas; and Lee DeWitt, Jr., of Waipahu, Hawaii.

Arthur Tress

THE TENTH PLANET by Jo Taylor

It was a cold day in Hell—the day Cocaine Charlie died.

"Get lost!" yelled Satan, from somewhere deep in Hell's hole. "We're overloaded with sinners already!"

"But St. Peter checked his list and told me to go to Hell," whined Charlie, on all fours, peering into the dark abyss.

"List or no list, do you know where you are?"

"Hell—the Tenth Planet, beyond Pluto, farthest from the Sun. Got directions from Heaven."

"Then even a hophead like *you* should know this is a frigid planet." Charlie shivered in the ice outside the steaming hole. "Hell's angels are working their tails off keeping the fire and brimstone going. Our Apple-computer network went kaput, our coal-heaping assembly quit, and Hell's rotten core is failing. The bad apples we have now aren't getting a fair shake. Not enough fire for screams. Only enough hot coals for weeping and gnashing of teeth."

"But I was gunned down this morning in a drug bust, and all my buddies are in—"

"Not a chance," Satan hissed. "I made you do it—put 'crack' into those MacIntoshes. Worked fine until you got caught and ruined everything. Instead of freezing and living, you ran and got iced. Could have gotten you off, too. Go to Pluto!"

Charlie rose to his feet as the rapidly shrinking hole narrowed to a crack in the ice and disappeared. And Hell froze over.

CLASSIFIED

MARKET

AM-FEBRUARY/88

ALFRED HITCHCOCK—published 13 times a year. CLASSIFIED AD rate is \$2.60 per word—payable in advance—(\$39.00 minimum). Capitalized words 40¢ per word additional.

AGENTS WANTED

WANTED: Managers For Party Plan Business. Profitable. Easy. Free Details. RMB, Box 883, Stevens Point, WI 54481.

AUTHOR'S SERVICE

PUBLISH YOUR BOOK! Join our successful authors. Publicity, advertising, beautiful books. All subjects invited. Send for fact-filled booklet and free manuscript report. Carlton Press, Dept. SM, 11 West 32 Street, New York 10001.

AUTOMOBILES & MIDGET CARS

IS it true . . . Jeeps For \$44 Through The Government? Call For Facts! 1-312-742-1142 Ext. 4674.

CADILLACS, Mercedes, Porsche, etc. direct from Government. Seized in drug raids. Available your area. Save \$thousands\$. 216-453-3000, Ext. A9308.

BOOKS & PERIODICALS

FREE LIST! Used Hardcover mystery and detective fiction. Dunn's Mysteries, Box 2544, Meriden, CT 06450.

100,000 science fiction and mystery paperbacks, magazines, hardcovers. Free catalogs! Pandora's, Box Z-54, Neche, ND 58265-0133.

FREE CATALOG. Used hardback mystery, crime and detective books. Steve Powell, Dept. DP, The Hideaway, Bar Harbor, Maine 04609.

SUPERLEARNING! Triple learning speed through music! Develop Supermemory; Control stress; tap potentials. Free book excerpt & catalog (Distributors Wanted). Superlearning, 450-Z1 Seventh Avenue, New York, NY. 10123.

FREE CATALOG: used hardback mysteries, crime, detective and spy fiction, list A: rare and first editions, list B: reading copies want lists accepted. MITCHELL BOOKS, 1395 E. WASHINGTON BL., PASADENA, CA 91104 (818) 798-4438.

BOOKS & PERIODICALS—Cont'd

HALF PRICE MYSTERY/Sci-Fi. Send for free catalog. Book Place, 2710 Middlefield Rd., Palo Alto, CA 94306.

PAPERBACKS, used, 75,000, all categories. \$3.00 up plus postage. Send SASE, want list. Book Swap, 1916 Welsh Road #4M, Philadelphia, PA 19115.

FREE list used hardcover and paperback mysteries. Mystery Mansion, 915 N. Combee, Lakeland, FL 33801.

FREE FIRST CATALOG. Used hardcover mystery, detective, Science Fiction, more. Black and White BOOKS, 140 Warren Street, #6D-W, Brooklyn, New York 11201.

FREE CATALOG! Used hardback mystery, detective and true crime. Wallace Pratt, 1801 Gough St., San Francisco, CA 94109.

A TREASURY OF VICTORIAN MURDER. Illustrated satirical account famous 19th century murders! \$6.95 at NBM-M, 35-53 70th St., Jackson Heights, N.Y. 11372.

MAKE YOUR CLASSIFIED AD PAY. Get "How to Write a Classified Ad That Pulls." Includes certificate worth \$2.00 towards a classified ad in this publication. Send \$2.25 (includes postage) to I.M. Bozoki, Davis Publications, Inc., Dept. CL, 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017.

BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

STAY HOME! MAKE MONEY ADDRESSING ENVELOPES. VALUABLE GENUINE OFFER. 20¢. Write Lindco, 3636-DA Peterson Ave., Chicago, IL 60659.

SELL Books! High Profits! No Minimum Orders! Free Catalog: Duke's Publishing, Box 183, Candler, Florida 32624.

COPY MACHINE PUBLISHING. EARN THOUSANDS MONTHLY—EASY NO GUESS-WORK—\$5.00: Capricorn Publishing, Box 348087A, Chicago, IL 60634.

PLACE

CLASSIFIED

AH-FEBRUARY/88

To be included in the next issue please send order and remittance to I. M. Bozoki, Classified Ad Manager, DAVIS PUBLICATIONS, INC., 380 Lexington Ave., New York, N.Y. 10017.

BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES—Cont'd

EARN Money processing mail. Excellent Income! For free details send SASE to: Velez Enterprises, P.O. Box 618329, Suite 325, San Antonio, Texas 78268-1329.

BUY IT WHOLESALE

400,000 BARGAINS Below Wholesale! Many Free! Liquidations . . . Closeouts . . . Job Lots . . . Single Samples. Free Details. Worldwide Bargainhunters, Box 1409-IO, Holland MI 49424.

EDUCATION & INSTRUCTION

WITCHCRAFT Occult Miracle Power Secrets Gavin and Yvonne Frost. Now accepting students. 1502-AN, Newbern, NC 28560.

"WHODUNIT: The Art & Tradition of Mystery Literature," the Sixth Annual Key West Literary Seminar, January 14-17, 1988. Registration information (305) 745-3640 or P.O. Box 391, Sugarloaf Shores, FL 33044.

GIFTS THAT PLEASE

A gift sure to please—ISAAC ASIMOV's SCIENCE FICTION MAGAZINE, published monthly. Send \$19.50 for 13 issues (includes shipping & postage) to Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine, P.O. Box 1933, Marion, OH 43305.

HEALTH & BEAUTY

LOSE WEIGHT, stop smoking, become successful. Your subconscious mind does the work with subliminal tape programs! FREE INFORMATION on ordering and distributorships. SUCCESS ACHIEVEMENT, 3201 Pioneers Blvd., Ste. 200, Lincoln, NE 68502.

JEWELRY

SOLID GOLD JEWELRY MANUFACTURER DISTRIBUTORSHIP AVAILABLE. INFORMATION CASSETTE SEND \$1: GF, BOX 1016 HIGH RIDGE, MO 63049.

JEWELRY—Cont'd

CLOSEOUT JEWELRY. 55¢ Dozen. 25¢ gets catalog. ROUSSELS, 107-310 Dow, Arlington, MA 02174-7199.

LOANS BY MAIL

BORROW \$25,000 "OVERNIGHT." Any purpose. Keep indefinitely! Free Report! Success Research, Box 19739-SM, Indianapolis, IN. 46219.

BORROW \$100—\$100,000! Instant Reply! Rush Stamped Addressed Envelope: Marigold, Box 2030-AA, Richardson, TX 75080.

THERE IS NO CHARGE FOR THE ZIP CODE: please use it when ordering merchandise from classified advertisements. You'll receive faster delivery.

MAILING LISTS

GUARANTEED Opportunity Buyers! Thousands available weekly! Adhesive labels! 100/\$2.50; 200/\$4.50; 500/\$8.50; 1000/\$12.50. D-CO, Box 526-T, Griffith, IN 46319.

MONEYMAKING OPPORTUNITIES

30+ "SECRET" GET RICH QUICK BOOKS OF 1987, INTELLIGENTLY ANALYZED! Free details. Rolltop Publishing, 4300 NW 23rd Street, Suite 401-D, Box 1702, Gainesville, Florida 32602.

BECOME A PROFESSIONAL REAL ESTATE APPRAISER. Earn certification. Home study or classes. Atlanta, Los Angeles. Free Information. 800 223-4542.

CAN YOU STUFF 1000 envelopes for \$500.00 weekly? Send six 22¢ stamps. Blume, Box 866714, Plano, TX 75086.

WOULD YOU STUFF 1000 envelopes for \$1,000.00? Find out how. Sase To: Clemens Enterprises D, 3528 Esplendor Ave., Irving, Texas 75062.

WEALTH, Success, Freedom can be yours! Free information: Brian O'Brien Publications, P.O. Box 2489, Dept.-Q, Deming, N.M. 88031.

Classified Continued

AH-FEBRUARY/88

MONEYMAKING OPPORTUNITIES—Cont'd

\$60.00 per Hundred securing-stuffing envelopes from home. Offer-details: Rush stamped self-addressed envelope. Imperial, P-460, X17410, Fort Lauderdale, FL 33318.

THE original envelope stuffing business. Earn up to \$1500 weekly. Send \$1, SASE: Taylor Enterprises, Box 5924-D9, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada T6C 4E8.

GOOD MONEY! Weekly! Processing mail! Free Supplies, Postage! No Selling! Information? Rush stamped envelope! Foodmaster-DCM, Burnt Hills, NY 12027.

1000/Thousand weekly stuffing envelopes. Details. Send stamped self addressed envelope. Betty Matter, 1104 Denton St., Kerrville, TX 78028.

EASY Business, earn \$1,000's Weekly! Free details! Send Stamped Addressed Envelope: Todco, Dept. 3, 4219 W. Olive Ave., Burbank, CA 91505.

HOME workers needed nationally to process mail. High income possible. For details rush \$5.00 (postage) to: SET, 5627 Graceland, Peoria, IL 61614.

SAVE Hundreds!! 40 sensational, revolutionary "Moneymaking Opportunities" summarized, and evaluated by Professionals. Write: "Lowdown", 1205 Guerneville Road, Santa Rosa, CA 95403.

DIAMONDS!—Gemstones! \$400/week. easily earned part-time from home! How to import without experience/capital! Exciting report/sample free!!! Amethyst Box 2348-B12, Niagara Falls, N.Y. 14302-2348.

"GREAT. MONEY MAKING opportunity. AMAZING NEW book shows HOW to start your PROFITABLE business at home. WRITE TODAY for FREE details. George Vakis, 15105 Sherman Way, Apt. 209-A, Van Nuys, CA 91405."

MONEYMAKING OPPORTUNITIES—Cont'd

\$1000 WEEKLY POSSIBLE! Mailing Envelopes! Easy Guaranteed Income! Free Details: SEVENSTAR, Box 187-D, Niagara Falls, NY 14305.

OF INTEREST TO ALL

PROTECT Your home and loved ones from crime. Free FBI crime report. Write to: Security and Protection, Box 418207, Cin. O. 45241.

"GAG ME WITH A SURFBOARD" is a manual to help you quit smoking. Send \$21.95 to RMARTIN Co. 1-AH, 1479 Kensington Ave. #172, Buffalo, N.Y. 14215.

How to Accomplish Anything You Want. Complete Information \$4.50 to: Clark Publishing, 128 Peterson #9, Louisville, KY 40206.

PERSONAL

SINGLE? Widowed? Divorced? Nationwide introductions! Refined, sincere people. 18-80. Identity, Box 315-DT, Royal Oak, Michigan 48068.

BEAUTIFUL GIRLS SEEK FRIENDSHIP AND MARRIAGE. American—Mexican—Philippine—European. Photo selection FREE! Latins, Box 1716-DD, Chula Vista, CA 92012.

NATIONWIDE Singles Magazine. Send Name, Address, Age. Send No Money. Exchange, 18172 Weldon #1580, Denver, Colo. 80202.

ORIENTAL ladies seeking correspondence, marriage. Presentations by American husband, Filipina wife. Asian Experience, Box 1214T, Novato, CA 94948.

PEN Pals! \$2.00 Two pals. Include age and photo. Steven—Marianne Kullmer, POB 418, Dysart, Iowa 52224.

FIND a dream wife. Guaranteed! Free photos, details. Write now. Quest, 14018 Downing, Beaverton, OR 97006.

**YOU'LL MAKE
MONEY**

**SAVE MONEY TOO—
BY READING and ANSWERING
THESE CLASSIFIED ADS**

Classified Continued

AH-FEBRUARY/88

PERSONAL—Cont'd

FRIENDSHIP, LOVE, EVEN MARRIAGE CAN BE IN YOUR FUTURE! Just \$5 and a short paragraph about you will get you a three months membership **AND AT LEAST 25** introductions specially selected for you! **NOBODY HAS A BETTER SELECTION!** Let us help you overcome your loneliness today! Write to: **UNICORN**, 6112 North Mesa, Suite 103, El Paso, Texas 79912, or call (915) 545-2670 for more information.

ASIAN WOMEN desire Romance! Sunshine International Correspondence—Dept. HF, Box 260, North Hollywood, CA 91603. (818) 769-1717.

INTERNATIONAL PEN FRIENDS—Exchange letters. USA and foreign, your choice. Patricia Smith, 2061 Perry Terrace, Stuart, Florida 34997.

READ "How to Write a Classified Ad That Pulls." Instructive booklet tells how to write an effective classified ad. Also includes certificates worth \$2.00 toward a classified ad in any of our publications. For your copy send \$2.25 (includes postage) to I.M. Bozoki, Davis Publications, Inc., 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017.

LONELY? Meet sincere singles of all ages through correspondence. Pentronics, P.O. Box 467-D, Washington, IA 52353.

HIGH SCHOOL AT HOME, no classes. Diploma awarded, low cost. Information free, call toll free anytime. 1-800-228-5600 or write: American School, Dept. 388, 850 E. 58th St., Chicago, IL 60637.

PERSONAL—Cont'd

WITCHCRAFT Occult Miracle Power Secrets Gavin and Yvonne Frost. Now accepting students. 1502-AN, Newbern, NC 28560.

SALESMEN-DISTRIBUTORS

BIG PROFITS selling our new battery operated Jewelry. Sample \$5.00 to: Royal Enterprises, Box 1069, Suite 251, Chesterfield, MO 63006.

SONGWRITERS

POEMS WANTED. Songs recorded and published. Radio-TV promotions. Broadway Music Productions, Box 7438-DA, Sarasota, FL 33578.

TAPES & CASSETTES

OLDTIME radio programs. Mysteries, adventure, suspense, science fiction, comedies. Classic tapes. Free catalogue. Carl D. Froelich, Heritage Farm, New Freedom, Pennsylvania 17349.

SHERLOCK Holmes 44 Audio Cassette Collection (818) 707-0505.

UNUSUAL BOOKS

THE INTELLIGENCE LIBRARY: Many unique books & official manuals on **RESTRICTED** subjects—Bugging, Wiretapping, Locksmithing, Covert Investigation, & **MUCH MORE.** Free brochures. MENTOR, DP, 135-53 No. Blvd., Flushing, N.Y. 11354.

For Greater Savings...Results...and Profits...

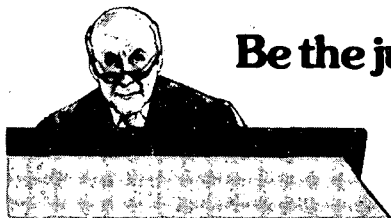
PLACE YOUR AD IN ONE OF OUR SPECIAL COMBINATIONS:

Combo #1, Combo #2, or Combo #3.

Each combination is designed to give your ad the largest audience available.

Each combination offers you a Special Discount Rate.

For further information write to I. M. Bozoki, Classified Ad Manager, Davis Publications, Inc., 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017.



Be the judge and jury for just \$1.

Get \$174.40 worth of Best Selling Mysteries for \$1.

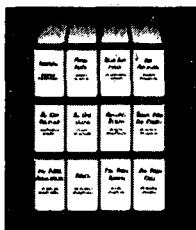
- ☒ You get twelve full-length novels for \$1. ☒ Select only the books you want.
☒ Save 60 to 80% off original publishers' prices. ☒ Pay no money in advance, ever.

JUDGE FOR YOURSELF. Our mystery books are the best spine-tinglers anywhere. To introduce you to these gripping tales of suspense and intrigue, we're making this remarkable offer. . . . For only \$1, The Detective Book Club will send you these twelve full-length novels, each a masterpiece of mystery. Bought separately, these twelve novels would cost you \$174.40. For this special trial offer, all twelve are yours, in four handsome, hardcover triple-volumes as shown, for only \$1 plus shipping. An incredible value.

SAVE 60-80%. As a member you are GUARANTEED a savings of 60-80% off original publishers' prices. That's a savings of at least \$22 for each triple-volume you choose to own. And most importantly, you will select from only the best of the more-than-400 mysteries published yearly. Authors like Donald E. Westlake, Hammond Innes and Hugh Pentecost. For any triple-volume you select, you pay just \$9.95 plus shipping. . . . that's only \$3.32 for each easy-to-read, unabridged, full-length mystery.

There's No Mystery! There is no mystery to how our club works. Six times a year you will receive, free, the club's Preview describing upcoming selections. As a member, you may reject any volume before or after receiving it.

There is never a minimum number of books to buy, and you may return any unwanted selection within 21 days and owe nothing. And of course, you may cancel your membership at any time. As one of the oldest book clubs in America, we want you to be satisfied. Simply fill out the coupon and return it to: The Detective Book Club, Roslyn, NY 11576.



Please enroll me as a member and send me my four triple-volumes shown here, containing twelve mysteries. I enclose no money now. I'll examine them for 10 days, then will either accept all for \$1 plus shipping, or return them and owe nothing.

As a member, I will receive, free, the club's Preview which describes my next selections. I will always have at least 10 days to reject any volume by returning the form provided. I may return any book within 21 days and owe nothing. For each volume I keep, I'll send you \$9.95 plus shipping. I may cancel my membership at any time. Satisfaction Guaranteed.

THE DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB, Roslyn, NY 11576

88-CJ

D24M4V

Mr./Mrs./Ms. _____

PUBLISHED BY
WALTER J. BLACK, INC.

Street _____

City _____

State _____

Zip _____



ESTABLISHED 1923

Note: Members accepted in USA and Canada only. Offer slightly different in Canada.

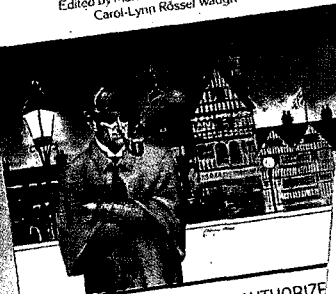
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Mysteries So Good, It Would Be A Crime To Pass Them Up!

The New Adventures of **SHERLOCK HOLMES**

Original Stories by Eminent Mystery Writers

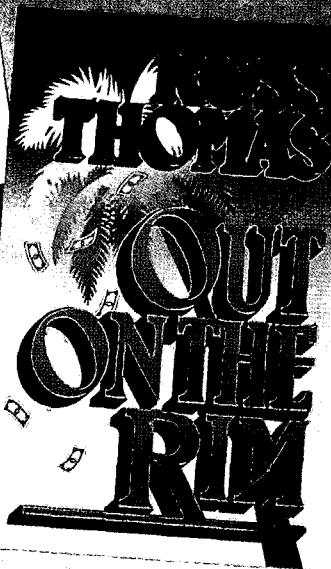
Edited by Martin Harry Greenberg and
Carol-Lynn Rosset Waugh



CENTENNIAL EDITION AUTHORIZED
BY THE CONAN DOYLE ESTATE

THE NEW ADVENTURES OF SHERLOCK HOLMES

A tribute to Holmes,
Watson and Conan Doyle
by some of the finest
contemporary mystery
writers whose stories
continue the legend of
Sherlock Holmes.



OUT ON THE RIM

"What Elmore Leonard
does for crime in the
streets, Ross Thomas
does for crime in the
suites." —*Village Voice*
The brilliant new thriller
by one of America's
toughest crime writers.

America finds it at

Waldenbooks®

Books • Audio • Video • Magazines • Book Clubs • Special Orders

Over 1000 stores nationwide.

Check the Yellow Pages for the Waldenbooks store nearest you.

Waldenbooks
welcomes the
American Express Card®



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

You're invited to the trial.



GOOD BEHAVIOR
by Donald E. Westlake
Threatened with exposure,
Dortmund is charged with
an impossible task.
Pub. List \$15.95



NIGHTMARE TIME
by Hugh Pentecost
Chambrun faces a heart-
breaking choice... his country
or his woman.
Pub. List \$14.95



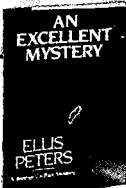
THE BAD-NEWS MAN
by Mary McMullen
Will this marriage last "until
death do us part"? Whose
death?
Pub. List \$12.95



HIGH STAND
by Hammond Innes
Priceless red cedars hide a
lethal secret.
Pub. List \$17.95



THE CROSSFIRE KILLINGS
by Bill Knox
A policeman's vacation turns
into a holiday with death.
Pub. List \$12.95



AN EXCELLENT MYSTERY
by Ellis Peters
Brother Cadfael faces double
mystery—a mute and a
missing girl.
Pub. List \$14.95



**MRS. CRAGGS: CRIMES
CLEANED UP**
by H.R.F. Keating
When charwoman Craggs
cleans up crime not even
kings are safe.
Pub. List \$14.95



**NOBODY HERE BY THAT
NAME**
by Donald MacKenzie
Raven is on his own... against
a group that recognizes no law.
Pub. List \$12.95



A CUT IN DIAMONDS
by Michael Kirk
Laird uncovers a case of cold-
blooded murder and a cache
of "hot ice".
Pub. List \$12.95



GIDEON'S WAY
by William Vivian Butler
as J.J. Marric
London's future is jeopardized
by a small child.
Pub. List \$14.95



LION IN THE VALLEY
by Elizabeth Peters
Kalenschief is shot and
Ramses just escapes kidnappers.
Will Amelia be next?
Pub. List \$15.95



GO GENTLY, GALJIN
by James Melville
Otan's crack team solves an
"impossible" murder case.
Pub. List \$12.95

RECEIVE 12 MYSTERIES FOR JUST \$1

For details see last page.

THE DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED